

# *Unsheathed*

THE STORY OF MUHAMMAD



*Tara MacArthur*

This is the story of the goatherd who changed the world. Although he was one of the most influential men in history, few people today know anything about him. This book, researched from the earliest Islamic sources, documents his life.

Here at last the truth is laid bare: his humble beginnings; why he believed he had a message from Allah; how he convinced some of his neighbours to accept his message and why others were sceptical; and what eventually led to swords being

# Unsheathed

In the bitter conflict for Arabia's soul, treaties were broken, strangers were slain, and parents, children, brothers and wives were betrayed. Survivors were drawn into the close-knit Muslim community and the compelling rule of *sharia*. The Prophet, convinced that Allah had sent him as a mercy to all the world, met every challenge without faltering in his mission.

This is the story of Muhammad.

*This edition is complete, unabridged and fully-referenced.*



# *Unsheathed*

**The Story of Muhammad**

**Tara MacArthur**

Unsheathed: The Story of Muhammad.

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Truly the Messenger is a light that enlightens  
and a drawn Indian sword, a sword of Allah.

When they professed Islam in Mecca's vale,  
the Quraysh tribe ordered them to leave.  
They departed, but they were no weaklings;  
they had arms for the battle and courage.

When Allah's Messenger sent me a death-threat,  
I feared him more than a hunting lion  
whose lair is hidden in the jungle thicket.  
Fools walked on both sides of my camel, saying,  
"Truly, O Kaab, thou art as good as slain!"  
And every friend in whom I hoped said,  
"I cannot help thee; I am too busy to mind thee."

Yet I pushed across the desert in the dark,  
still hoping for pardon from Allah's Messenger,  
until I laid my right hand irrevocably in his,  
the Avenger who speaks the Word of Truth.

Be guided by Allah, whose warnings are plain,  
who gave thee the gift of the Quraan!

Kaab ibn Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma,  
Medina, 630

*paraphrased from Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 600-601.*

## *Foreword*

Islam affects all of us. In the major cities of the West, we hear the call to prayer; we see veiled women walking the streets; and we find *halal* slaughter packaged in our supermarkets. We would not think much about those things if they were all we observed.

At the same time, sober newscasters inform us of *jihad* warriors who commit murder, rape, arson and suicide in the name of Islam. We hear whispers of secret *sharia* tribunals that flout our national laws; a rumbling rumour of ferocious levels of domestic violence; and shouts that Islam must never be criticised. All this, we are told, has nothing to do with true Islam. It's just a distortion.

This book is not about the distortion of Islam or even about why Islam is so easily distorted. It is an attempt to describe the undistorted, original Islam by explaining how Islam began. I have not tried to decide whether "original" Islam is the same thing as "true" Islam. I have only shown what Muhammad believed, taught and did.

Our teachers advise us to study history in order to avoid repeating its mistakes. By knowing the history of Islam, perhaps we shall also learn about some mistakes of history that we should avoid repeating in future. Nevertheless, I have tried to document the facts of Muhammad's life without making endless commentary on them. I have not drawn attention to the parallels between historical events and current affairs. Readers can easily do that for themselves.

This is the story of Muhammad, the founder of Islam, and of his vision for the world.

Tara MacArthur

## *Arabia in Muhammad's Time*





# *An Arab Orphan*

**April 571 – July 595**

When Muhammad was born, nobody guessed that he was destined to change the world.

His home city, Mecca, was a self-important little trading-post high in the desert-mountains of western Arabia. It was famous for its Kaaba Temple but, in the eyes of its larger neighbours, it had no political or military power and less scholarship or science.

His parents were both from the Quraysh, which was the dominant tribe of Mecca, but they were not from high-status clans within that tribe. His father, Abdallah Hashim, was a clay-worker and date-merchant. His mother, Amina Zuhra, had no money. They had no other children, for Abdallah had died only a few months after their marriage.

The young widow gave birth in April 571.\* She named her child *Muhammad*, which means “praiseworthy”. Her father-in-law took the newborn to the Kaaba Temple. There he stood before the god Hubal, a red agate idol with a golden right hand, and thanked Him for the gift of a healthy boy.

Amina did not spend much time with her baby. For several days she left him with a slave to be wet-nursed.<sup>1</sup> Then she sent him out of Mecca to a paid foster-family in the desert.

So the baby Muhammad lived in a Bedouin’s tent in the barren wilderness, where his foster-parents, Harith and Halima, herded camels and goats. For two years he was breast-fed along with Halima’s own son.

Halima brought Muhammad back to Mecca every year to show him to his biological family. When he was one year old, Amina saw that he had grown into a large, strong child. When he was two,

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\* All Arabian dates have been translated to their Gregorian equivalent.

Halima weaned him; but she was not ready to give him up. She pleaded that in the city he might catch the plague, and the outcome was that Amina agreed to let the foster-family keep him for a few years longer. By the time he was three, Muhammad had learned to speak Arabic with the clear accent of their desert tribe.

Muhammad and his foster-brother used to play in the goats' pasture-land. When they were four years old, Muhammad suffered a seizure and was hurled to the ground. His foster-brother ran for help, crying that Muhammad had been murdered, and their parents arrived to find him pale and rigid. Halima feared he might be possessed by the *jinn*,\* and Harith thought it was a stroke. He said they must return the boy to Mecca before they were accused of not looking after him properly.

They explained to the Hashim clan† what had happened but they found that Amina was in no hurry to reclaim her child. She dismissed their fears and told them she wanted Muhammad to continue living in the desert as before.

Halima obeyed for a while, but she was always careful to keep him close to her tent. Muhammad watched the women making cheese, spinning goatshair and weaving tents and carpets. His foster-mother became more and more frightened of caring for him. When he was five, she gave up and took him back to Mecca.

Amid the city crowds, Muhammad managed to slip away from his foster-mother. He wandered around the city for hours. Halima searched until she was exhausted, but finally she had to go to the Hashim clan's house and confess that she had lost him. Muhammad's grandfather also combed the crowds. When he could

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\* The *jinn* were malicious fire-spirits that the Arab polytheists tried to appease. Muhammad believed in and feared the *jinn* throughout his life. In the familiar story of Aladdin, the word *jinn* is usually rendered "genie".

† A "clan" is a division of a tribe. The Quraysh tribe had sixteen clans: Abdaldar, Abdshams, Adiy, Amir, Asad, Harith, Hashim, Juma, Makhzum, Muharib, Muttalib, Naowfal, Sahm, Taym, Umayya and Zuhra.

not find the child either, he went to the Kaaba Temple to implore the gods for mercy. While he was still praying, a man named Waraqa entered, leading Muhammad by the hand and saying he had found the lost boy in Upper Mecca. Muhammad's foster-mother then walked out of his life while his grandfather lifted him onto his shoulder to carry him to his new home.<sup>2</sup>

City life in Mecca must have been bewildering after the open desert. The Hashim household was very crowded, for Muhammad's grandfather had three young wives and eight children under ten. Amina, though a kindly mother, was a distant figure. She delegated the daily tasks of caring for him to her Ethiopian slave, Baraka, a devoted nurserymaid who was only a child herself.

When Muhammad was six, Amina took him to visit his relatives in Medina, a city to the north where his father was buried. The journey took a week, and they stayed a month. Muhammad had a happy holiday: he played with the neighbours' daughter just outside the stone houses, climbed up to the roof with his cousins to scare the pigeons into flight and learned to swim in the family's pond.

On their homeward journey, Amina became ill. Within a few hours she died. Muhammad and his maid Baraka, alone in the desert with two camels, had to bury his mother by themselves. Baraka took care of him as they made their way back to his grandfather's house unguided.<sup>3</sup>

Muhammad's grandfather, Abdalmuttalib, was an erect old man who dyed his hair black with indigo. Now he spent his days sitting on a mat beside the Zamzam Well at the Kaaba Temple, distributing its holy water. It was said that a person could drink Zamzam water for a month without needing food and that it could cure fevers. Abdalmuttalib owned the water because he had dug the well himself. Since everyone wanted to drink the holy water, the old man had no need to do anything more than sit on his mat awaiting customers.

The Kaaba was a famous temple that housed 360 gods. Pilgrims from all over Arabia came to worship there, and their custom created a kind of tourist industry for Mecca. The pilgrims were not supposed to bring any food into the holy area and nor did the Quraysh sell them any. Abdalmuttalib held the sole right to provide food for the pilgrims free of charge. To finance this expense, all the other Quraysh paid him a levy. He managed the business at a profit and was able to provide for his family on the takings.

Muhammad liked to sit on his grandfather's mat, watching the bubbling of the well or staring up at the two idols, Isaf and Naila, who guarded it, while people walked in and out of the Kaaba. Abdalmuttalib's children had too much respect to touch the mat, and they tried to discourage Muhammad's daring; but when the old man found out, he gave Muhammad permission to continue sitting there next to him. At times Muhammad pushed the old man right off the mat.

Abdalmuttalib's children were like siblings to Muhammad, and he was close to several of them. He loved Safiya, the only girl, who was two years older than himself; she was tough and fearless and she fought alongside the boys. He bonded with Abbas, a year older than Safiya, who was a clever opportunist. He was under the protection of Hamza, a year older than Abbas, a strong, violent boy with more brawn than brains. Abdalmuttalib also had several grown-up children by his previous marriages. It is said that the whole family had such long, hooked noses that when they drank, their noses touched the liquid before their mouths.<sup>4</sup>

Mecca was hot and dry; often there was no rain for years at a time. Then the earth would quake and the skies fill with dust-clouds. One year the drought was so severe that Abdalmuttalib's camels and falcons all died. The family emptied their money-bags and worried that they would starve. Muhammad and his uncles poured out the last of their water on a ritual washing, perfumed their heads and paraded across the city, stopping at the Kaaba to kiss its pillar. Then they climbed Mount Abu Qubays to beseech the gods for

mercy.

Out in the heights, Abdalmuttalib stepped forward to pray to Hubal, the god of clouds and wells. "O my Lord! We are Thy slaves and children of Thy slaves, and Thou seest our misfortunes. We are on the verge of death, so keep away this famine from us and bring us plenty and prosperity."

The children responded, "Amen!"

Soon afterwards the drought broke, and the family believed that Hubal had answered their prayers.

The drought had ruined Muhammad's little fortune. His father had left him only five camels and a flock of sheep. These animals would have died in the drought, leaving Muhammad with nothing of his own except the child-slave Baraka.<sup>5</sup>

Baraka kept Muhammad nicely groomed. He always greeted his family with his hair combed and oiled and his eyes bright with antimony-drops. For the rest of his life, he was particular about such details as keeping his clothes patched and clean, washing between his toes and inside his ears and clipping his nails. He cleaned his teeth four or five times a day; whenever he entered the house, he would reach for his toothstick, which was a twig of mustard bush.

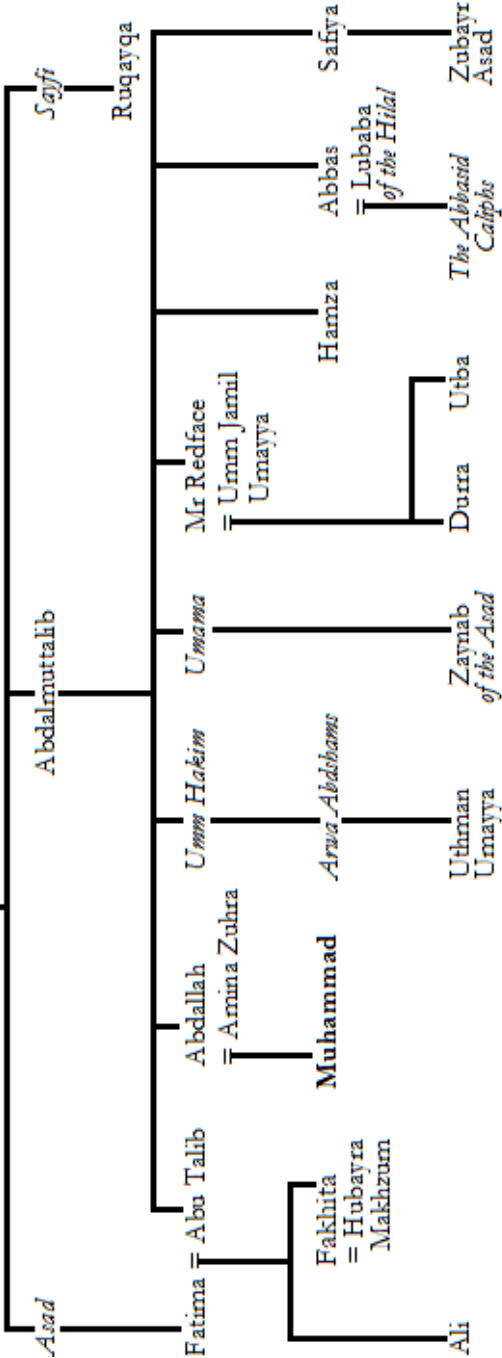
Baraka recalled that Muhammad had a picky appetite. Each morning he would help himself to a drink of water from the Zamzam Well. At midday Baraka would try to persuade him to eat lunch, but he often told her, "I don't want it. I'm not hungry." He never complained of hunger or thirst.<sup>6</sup>

When Muhammad was eight his life changed again, for his grandfather died at the age of 80. Muhammad wept as he followed Abdalmuttalib's funeral procession. Then he was claimed by a grown-up uncle, the serious and responsible Abu Talib.

Abu Talib was finally able to provide Muhammad with a stable home. He kept him in his house for the next sixteen years and

The Family of Muhammad

Hashim (clan founder) of the Quraysh tribe in Mecca



treated him like one of his own children. Once Muhammad took his uncle's pillow and fell asleep on it. When Abu Talib came looking for it and was told that Muhammad had it, he said only, "My nephew knows how to take advantage of good things!"

The main problem in their home was poverty. Abu Talib owned a small flock of camels, so the family had enough milk to survive; but his business ventures did not earn enough to provide anything beyond basic necessities for his growing family. His eldest son was Muhammad's age, and seven more children were born later.

One day a fortune-teller from Yemen set up a stall in Mecca. The superstitious Quraysh parents lined up their children to hear their fortunes, and Abu Talib brought his children along with the rest. He was disappointed. As the fortune-teller was looking at Muhammad, he became distracted and turned away. When he turned back, doubtless anxious not to lose a customer's fee, he cried, "Bring me that boy!" His enthusiastic sales-pitch disturbed Abu Talib, who pulled Muhammad away. They walked off with the fortune-teller still calling after them. The family later claimed that the man had insisted, "Bring me that boy whom I saw just now, for he has a great future!"<sup>7</sup>

All the most successful citizens of Mecca were merchants. When Muhammad was twelve Abu Talib tried to earn some money by joining a trading-caravan to Syria.\* As he was leaving, Muhammad, who had always gone everywhere with his uncle, clutched at him. "Are you leaving me alone?" he asked. "I have no mother to look after me!"

Whether Muhammad's aunt-in-law really did favour her own children over him, or whether he was just teasing his uncle, Abu Talib took the hint. He pulled Muhammad up onto his camel behind him and agreed to take him to Syria.

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\* Arabs used the term "Syria" to include the areas that we now call Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Iraq.

The journey took a month. Muhammad made himself useful by guarding the baggage. They passed through Christian tribes in northern Arabia before reaching Syria, which was a province of the Eastern Roman\* Empire. Muhammad saw churches. He ate and slept as a guest of the monasteries.<sup>8</sup> He noted that Christians believed in only one God, revered a cross and read from a holy book. Since this book had no Arabic translation, the monks' Greek mutterings were mysterious.

At Basra Bazaar he met ordinary people who told stories in Arabic. He discovered that Jews and Zoroastrians also had holy books and also believed in only one God.

The Jews told stories from the Talmud. Cain murdered his brother Abel, and a raven demonstrated how to bury the body. The Queen of Sheba visited King Solomon in his crystal palace and, mistaking his glassy floor for a lake she must cross, she lifted her skirts to reveal her hairy legs. The two angels Harut and Marut visited earth, where a girl elicited from them the Sacred Name of God, for which she was transformed into a star.

The Christians' stories were from the Gnostic literature. They spoke of a girl named Mary who lived in the inner sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem and was miraculously fed by angels. Mary became pregnant while still a virgin and had to answer a charge of fornication before the priests. When she was in direst need, a palm tree bowed down and dropped dates on her. Then she gave birth to the Prophet Jesus.

Most striking of all was the recurring theme of the divine Balancing Scales of Judgment Day. A dead person would stand before God and his good and bad deeds would be weighed in the scales. Those whose evil deeds weighed more heavily would be thrown into

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\* By the time of Muhammad, the capital of the "Roman" Empire was Constantinople and its people spoke mainly Greek. The Arabs called these people "Romans" but modern historians call them "Byzantines", "Eastern Romans" or simply "Greeks".



Hellfire, but those whose good works were heavier would live forever in Heaven. The Jews had this idea in their Talmud. The Christians took it from *The Testament of Abraham*, a popular moral tale from Egypt. Neither group knew that the ancient Egyptians had believed in the same Divine Balance over 3,000 years earlier.

Muhammad wrongly assumed that these stories came from the Bible. Yet when he heard a real Bible story, it struck him as unreliable. Christians claimed that Jesus had been crucified; this was the reason why Muhammad was seeing crosses everywhere. Other people, especially Persians, denied that a holy man could be killed so shamefully. They claimed that another person had been substituted for Jesus and had died in His place. Muhammad liked this version better.<sup>9</sup>

At the bazaar the Arabs sold or bartered their merchandise then reloaded their camels with Syrian goods to re-sell at a profit in Mecca. Muhammad kept an eye on the buying and selling and made a mental note of his uncle's mistakes. He already had a smarter business sense than Abu Talib.

The journey did not help. It did not restore Abu Talib's fortunes, and he remained a poor man. So Muhammad had to look for a job. He was not educated: like most other people in Mecca, he could not even read. He had no money of his own and no rich friends, so he had no chance to prove himself in business. He had to accept the most menial work available.<sup>10</sup>

For several years he worked as a goatherd for whichever neighbour would hire him. Watching goats was boring, and of course Muhammad found ways to amuse himself on the job. He and his friends played games with stones. He picked berries off mustard bushes, and he learned the hard way that it was better to eat only those that had already ripened to black. He loved camel races, and since camels came under his care, he probably found a way to set them to the race-track.

Twice he tried to shirk his work altogether. He asked another boy

to take over his night shift while he sneaked back to the city to seek out entertainment. On both occasions, he only reached the first house in Mecca before hearing the pipes and drums of a wedding party. He sat down to watch the show, nodded off to sleep and did not awaken until dawn. With so little reward, he soon abandoned the sins of night-life.

Perhaps because of boredom, Muhammad developed some obsessive habits, which continued for the rest of his life. He disliked even numbers: he wiped himself in the toilet with three or five or seven pebbles but never four or six. He lay down to sleep on his right side. He liked to wash the right side of his body before the left and he combed his hair from the right side first. He was particularly obsessive about his sandals. His right sandal was always the first he put on and the left was the first that he removed. Whenever he sat down, he took them off and placed them at his side; but he never put them on again in a standing position. If a strap broke, he removed both sandals, for it was better to go barefoot than to walk with only one foot covered.

He hated extra months. The Arabian calendar had twelve months, each starting at the new moon. That meant their year was only about 354 days long, and 33 moon-years were about 32 sun-years. Recently some tribes had attempted to bring the Arab year into line with the sun by adding an extra month every year. Muhammad found this new custom disturbing. He hated the feeling of not knowing the “real” date so that holy days were profaned as ordinary and ordinary days were elevated as sacred.

Another aspect of this obsessiveness was his scrupulous honesty. He never broke the letter of the law; he discharged his duties exactly and never touched what did not belong to him. He guarded the pastures attentively and earned a reputation for being truthful and trustworthy. The neighbours became happy to hire him; but they only paid him in tamarind seeds.<sup>11</sup>

The rest of the family was more successful. Uncle Hamza became

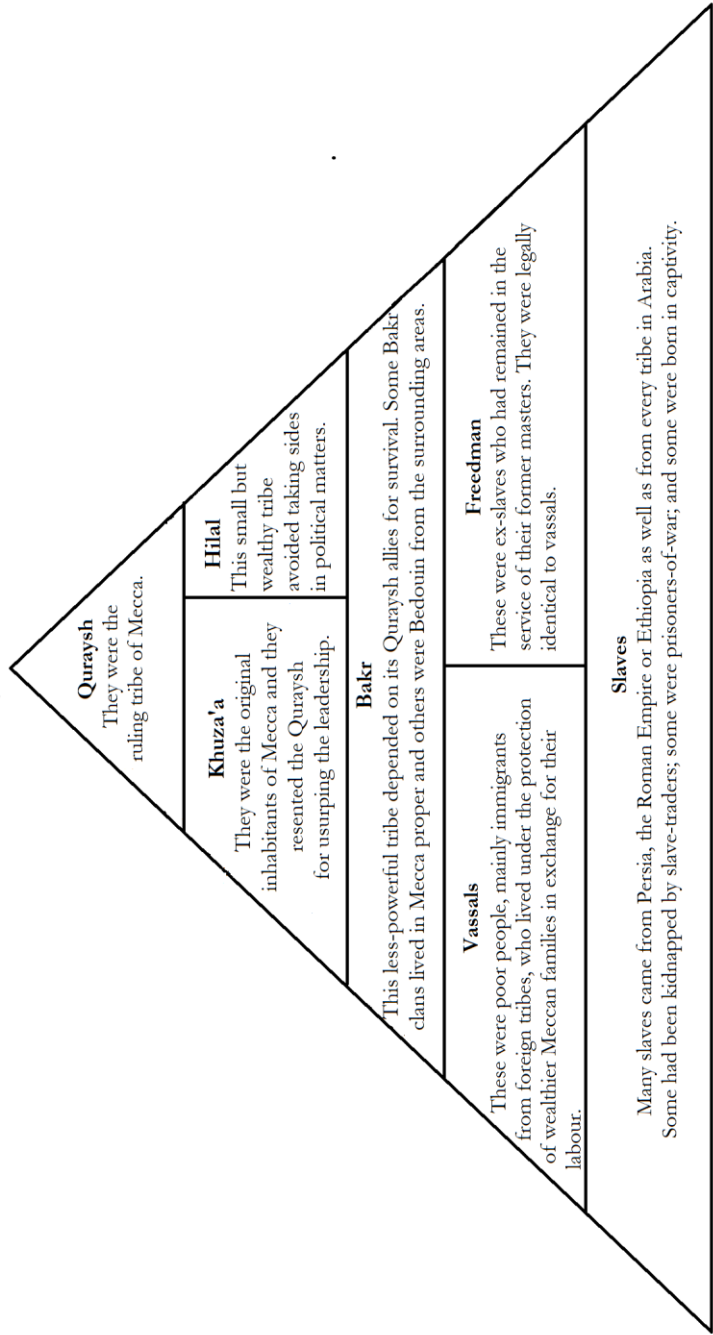
a hunter. Aunt Safiya married into the most powerful clan in Mecca, was divorced, then remarried to a man from the worst clan of the Quraysh. None of them was as rich as Uncle Abbas. He was earning good money in the spice trade. He owned a grape-orchard and distillery in Taïf. He had set himself up as a community banker, raking in interest from what he lent to his neighbours.<sup>12</sup>

Mecca's community life was centred on the Kaaba. The Kaaba was a sanctuary where no act of violence could be committed. No blood might flow near it: even menstruating women kept away. Both citizens and visitors regularly prayed to the gods for health, wealth, love or curses on their enemies; paid the priests to cast divining arrows that would reveal truths or guide their actions; then made the ritual walk in a leftward circle around their temple.

Muhammad worshipped the 360 gods just like everyone else. There was a god for every occasion, although some were more popular than others. Hubal, Lord of the Kaaba, was the chief god because He controlled the water. Since He was too great and remote to be approached directly, people usually worshipped the other gods as intermediaries.

Al-Uzza, a virgin star-goddess of military victory, was the special protector of Mecca. Al-Lat was also worshipped, but She was an earth-mother fertility goddess, so She had not bestowed many favours on Mecca, where nothing grew. Then there were Dhu-Samawi, god of camels; Manaf, the mysterious mountain-god who protected from the evil eye; Manat, goddess of death and destiny; Shams, a sun-goddess of wisdom and justice; Al-Ukaysir, god of music and resurrection; and Wudd, a moon-god of love and friendship. There were also Amm, Ammanas, Anbay, Ashima, Athtar, Dhu'l-Kaffayn, Fuls, Haowbas, Haowkam, Haowl, Ilmuqa, Kahil, Khalasa, Kutba, Nasr, Nikrah, Roob, Saad, Salm, Shingala, Suwaa, Syn, Taalab, Yaghuth, Yawuq and Yawus ... it is unlikely that anyone remembered the names of all of them.<sup>13</sup> The Kaaba was the centre of politics as well as religion. Mecca was ruled by a council of elders. They debated everything in the town hall

*The People of Mecca*



opposite the Kaaba until they came to agreement. Together they decided civic affairs, settled disputes, struck contracts, declared war, sent out trading caravans and advertised public announcements on the steps of the Kaaba. Whoever controlled the Kaaba controlled all Mecca. The elders in the Kaaba Council were all males over forty and all members of the dominant Quraysh tribe.

Muhammad, being a Quraysh, was more important than anyone who was not a Quraysh, and he had a chance of being invited to join the elders when he was forty. However, this was not guaranteed, for his clan, the Hashim, was not powerful or important among the Quraysh; and a penniless goatherd was not important even among the Hashim. By the time he was old enough to understand politics, Muhammad understood that he might never become influential in Mecca or work at any job more interesting than herding goats.<sup>14</sup>

In Arabia four months of the year were sacred: the seventh, eleventh, twelfth and first. During this sacred period all tribal fighting and personal blood-revenge were forbidden.

The twelfth month was the time of the Great Pilgrimage, when Mecca's tourist industry was busiest. People arrived from all over Arabia dressed in plain white sheets that exposed the right shoulder. They made ritual walks to various stations regarded as sacred and halted there for ritual waits. They ran backward and forward between the two hills Safa (directly opposite the Kaaba) and Marwa (about 450 metres or 500 yards away). They threw stones in Mina Valley at a pillar that represented the *jinn*. They circled the Kaaba seven times, moving to their left on foot or on camel-back. On the tenth day of the month they slaughtered an animal sacrifice to the gods – the only exception to the rule of no blood or violence in the precincts – and then ate the meat themselves. They signalled the end of the pilgrim state by shaving the hair off their temples and cropping their heads closely.

The permanent residents of Mecca did not bother with the full pilgrimage ritual every year. The pilgrimage state imposed tiresome restrictions: a ban on carrying weapons, damaging plants, transacting business deals, eating certain types of cheese or even passing through one's own front door, so a pilgrim who needed something from home had to climb over his back wall. Yet everyone, whether in pilgrim state or not, could celebrate the *Eid al-Adha* festival on the tenth day by saying a prayer and sacrificing an animal. Muhammad, over a period of 39 years, only ever performed the Great Pilgrimage twice.

At other times of year, people might make a Minor Pilgrimage, in which they circled the Kaaba and ran between the two hills but did not slaughter or throw stones.<sup>15</sup>

The eleventh month of the year was devoted to money. All the tribes met at great trade-fairs in Uqaz, Majanna and Dhu'l-Majaz, where they bought and sold, arranged marriages, discussed politics and showed off their poetry.

When Muhammad was seventeen, a shocking message arrived at Uqaz Fair. Although it was the sacred month, an ally from the Bakr tribe had murdered a Kilab merchant. The Quraysh were honour-bound to support their ally even though he was a blasphemous murderer. They mounted their camels and raced home. The Kilab tribe also abandoned the fair, pursued the Quraysh across the desert and overtook them near Mecca. They fought, but the clash was inconclusive. Random fights that broke out over the next few days did not settle anything because nobody was coordinating the operation.

The next year, the Kaaba Council declared the Unholy War. The Quraysh joined forces with the Bakr tribe and fought the Kilab and their allies near Uqaz. Muhammad's task was to pick up enemy arrows from the ground and give them to his uncles to re-shoot. The battle was undecided, so the following year, the two armies met again and fought it out a second time. The next year they

clashed for a third time at Al-Sharb. This time Muhammad was one of the archers. At first the Kilab seemed to be winning, but the Quraysh made a pact never to retreat. They fought to the death, and by noon they were able to claim a decisive victory.<sup>16</sup>

A month after that battle, in May 591, a Quraysh elder cheated a foreign merchant. When the foreigner complained, the cheat's allies beat him up. The foreigner then complained to the whole Kaaba Council. Several men declared that such an injustice could not be tolerated. The crowd marched off to the richest man's mansion – Muhammad along with the rest – to discuss how they ought to deal with such crimes.

The rich man served a banquet. Muhammad was squashed at the table and he bumped against his neighbour. The sharp-faced young man fell to the ground and scratched his knee so severely that it was permanently scarred. He never forgot the incident, and nor did Muhammad.

After the shuffling, the activists discussed the problem of crime and the nature of justice. The result of their discussion was that they all swore a solemn oath: "As long as the sea is wet and the mountains stand, we shall act together against crime. No matter whether the victim is a Meccan or a stranger, as long as we live we shall side with him against the culprit until justice is restored."

This oath was called the Extra Compact because it bound its members to act beyond the call of duty. They were loyal to an abstract concept of justice even if this conflicted with their traditional loyalty to their tribe, clan or family.

Then the confederates marched to the cheating elder, seized the merchandise and restored them to the visiting merchant.

Soon afterwards, a tourist stood at the Kaaba, shouting: "Help me, O Extra Compact!" Muhammad grabbed a sword and hurried to the Kaaba. There the Confederates were gathering around the distressed tourist. "Help!" he called. "Someone has kidnapped my

daughter!” The Confederates surrounded the kidnapper’s house, demanding he bring the girl out immediately. He haggled that he wanted to rape her first; but the Confederates persisted with drawn swords; and the kidnapper was forced to restore the girl to her father untouched.

The Extra Compact seemed to be working. Unfortunately it did not last very long. Twenty years later, when Mecca needed an Extra Compact, there was nothing. However, the radical idea that defying one’s own tribe might sometimes be the right thing to do impressed Muhammad. Decades later he recalled: “I witnessed a compact that I would not renounce for any number of fine camels. Even now, if I were asked to swear it again, I would.”<sup>17</sup>

The Unholy War against the Kilab tribe was not quite over, for one enemy clan remained defiant. So the following year at Nakhla there was yet another battle. This time the Quraysh victory was final. They paid blood-money\* for the Kilab men whom they had killed, perhaps sorry that they had fought a war for such an unjust cause. Nevertheless, Muhammad himself said that he never regretted fighting it.

Mecca was not a warlike city in general. The Unholy War was the only large-scale combat that it fought during the 51 years that Muhammad lived there.<sup>18</sup>

By this time Muhammad had grown into a handsome man. He was of average height, slim and light-complexioned. His face was rounded, with an aquiline nose and a wide mouth. He had wide, dark, long-lashed eyes, wavy hair and a thick beard. Abu Talib’s daughter Fakhita said that he had the best smile in the world.<sup>19</sup>

Muhammad smiled at Fakhita often, for he fell in love with her, and she admitted that she also loved him. Unfortunately,

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\* When one Arab killed another, he could avoid capital punishment by paying blood-money to his victim’s family. This was nearly always done for an accidental killing and sometimes it was accepted even in cases of deliberate murder.



Muhammad had a rival: a poet named Hubayra also loved Fakhita. This should not have been a serious problem. Although Hubayra was rich and clever and came from the powerful Makhzum clan, ancient custom gave an Arab man the first right to marry his father's brother's daughter. She could not be given to anyone else unless none of her father's brothers' sons wanted to take her. So Muhammad was confident when he asked Abu Talib to let him marry Fakhita. It was a surprise when his father's brother did not agree immediately.

The next Muhammad knew was that Fakhita had married his rival. He protested this blatant defiance of the custom. "Uncle, you have passed me over to marry her to Hubayra!"

Abu Talib gave a cryptic answer. "Nephew, a nobleman rewards a nobleman!" This might have meant that he owed a favour to the Makhzum clan; but in fact he did not. So he must have meant the opposite: now that he had obliged the Makhzumites by giving them Fakhita, *they* would owe favours to *him*. Abu Talib needed a few favours, for he still had no money. He could not afford to give away his daughter to a pauper like Muhammad.<sup>20</sup>

If Muhammad was ever to have a wife, children and a home of his own, he needed to earn some real money, not just tamarind seeds.

In the spring of 595 he heard about a job opportunity. His Aunt Safiya mentioned that her sister-in-law, a very wealthy merchant who lived next door, was looking for a new agent to conduct her trade in Syria. Abu Talib promptly presented himself to the merchant and recommended Muhammad for the job.

The merchant inquired about Muhammad. When the neighbours confirmed that he was truthful, trustworthy, generous and altogether of good character, she agreed to hire him for two camels. Abu Talib begged her to make it four. Muhammad was embarrassed by his uncle's grasping attitude, but the merchant smiled and agreed.

The caravan was very long, so the camels that Muhammad drove to Syria were probably carrying a variety of merchandise: cattle-hides, leather goods, sheepskins, woollen textiles, clarified butter, dried raisins, musk and silverwork. He sold the goods at Basra Bazaar, then used the money to buy Syrian products. These would have been grain, oil, wine, weapons, cotton and linen. After two months he arrived back in Mecca.

His employer sold the products at Mecca Bazaar and found that the profits were nearly double what she had expected. She was so pleased with Muhammad's competence that she again doubled his commission. He took home eight camels.<sup>21</sup>

A few days later, the same merchant sent Muhammad on a second business trip, this time to Tihama in Yemen. It was a sharp business move, for not many merchants wanted to battle through the heat of Yemen in summer: Muhammad would bring back a monopoly. Six weeks later he arrived home in Mecca with camel-loads of frankincense, myrrh, laudanum, ebony, ivory and fine striped textiles.

In the merchant's house, he collected a gift of food that had been stored away for him. A flirtatious half-African housemaid asked, "Is this Muhammad? Are you courting my mistress?"

"No, of course not," he replied.

Perhaps the maid was more perceptive than Muhammad. Since there were no competing goods at Mecca Bazaar, his products once again fetched a high price. His employer realised that her business would benefit if she secured his services permanently.

She decided that she wanted to marry him.<sup>22</sup>

### **Summary**

- Muhammad was born in Mecca, western Arabia, in April 571, as a member of the Quraysh tribe.
- He was a penniless orphan living under the protection of his

uncle, Abu Talib. Their clan, the Hashim, was respectable but not wealthy or powerful. Muhammad worked as a goatherd.

- People in Arabia worshipped multiple gods. The temple in Mecca, called the Kaaba, was a centre of pilgrimage. Whoever controlled the Kaaba also held all the political power in Mecca.
- Muhammad was popular with his neighbours, who found him truthful and trustworthy; but he had some obsessive habits.
- When he was 24 he went to Syria as a merchant's agent and proved competent.

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1 Q62:2. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 3, 9, 34, 38, 48-49, 52-56, 68-70, 82, 87. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 5. Ibn al-Kalbi (Faris) 23. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1: 102, 107-108, 118-119, 121-122. Baladhuri (Murgotten) 2:270-273. Muslim 19:4375. Margoliouth (1905) 2, 6. Guillaume (1960) 19.

2 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 70-73, 576. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 6. Waqidi (Faizer) 427. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:121-124, 125, 170-172, 191; (Bewley) 8:275. Muslim 1:311. The foster-family came from the Saad tribe of the Hawazin super-tribe.

3 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 73. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:100, 109, 129, 591; (Bewley) 3:4; 8:157. Muslim 19:4375. Tabari (Landau-Tasseron) 39:24, 191-192.

4 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 3, 8-9, 37-38, 48, 55-58, 61-65, 70, 73, 79, 87-89, 131-132, 192, 202-203, 301, 309-310, 312, 458, 520, 531, 547, 552. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 6. Ibn al-Kalbi (Faris) 8, 24-25. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:84, 86-89, 91-92, 99-101, 131, 173; (Bewley) 3:76; 8:29. Bukhari 4:54:483; 5:59:340. Muslim 1:402; 23:4879; 31:6046. Tirmidhi 2:5:1016; 4:10:2310. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:15; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:24-25. Margoliouth (1905) 7-9.

5 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 37, 64, 66-68, 70. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:95-96, 109. Muslim 19:4375. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:77. Margoliouth (1905) 7-8.

6 Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:133, 193-194, 429. Muslim 2:487, 488, 489, 495, 497. Abu Dawud 1:58, 108, 121, 126, 135, 148; 32:4051. Tirmidhi 1:1:39, 40.

7 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 73, 79. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 6. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:131-133, 135-136, 193.

8 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 79-82, 183. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 6. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:133-134, 174. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:44-46. Heck (2003).

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10 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 79-82. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:133-134, 174. Baladhuri (Murgotten) 2:271. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:44-46. Heck (2003). Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:166.

11 Q9:37. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 21-22, 81, 135. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 8. Ibn Saad (Haq)

- 1:140-141, 177. Bukhari 1:8:418; 2:21:223; 2:23:345, 349; 4:52:124; 7:65:292; 7:72:745, 810. Muslim 2:458, 463, 514; 4:2044, 2045; 7:2982; 23:5090. Abu Dawud 32:4123, 4126, 4128, 4129. Nasāʾi 1:1:112; 1:4:421; 3:21:1890, 1891; 4:28:3618; 6:48:5242, 5371, 5372. Tirmidhi 2:6:608. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:47. Tisdall (1905) 11. Guillaume (1960) 20, 22-23.
- 12 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 79, 113, 114, 131, 202, 206, 309-310, 312-313, 520, 651. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:29. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:86.
- 13 Q2:125-127; 22:26-33. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 9, 24, 28, 36-39, 46, 48, 66-67, 70, 552. Ibn al-Kalbi (Faris) 8, 12-31. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:134; 2:169. Bukhari 6:60:442. Margoliouth (1905) 9, 18. Tisdall (1905) 8-9. Lammens (1913-1936). Schleifer (1913-1936). Guillaume (1960) 22. Fahd (1960-2007) “al-Ukaysir.” Fahd (1960-2007) “Manaf.” Lindemans (1999b). Lindemans (1999c). Ryckmans (2007).
- 14 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 3, 48-49, 52-56, 84-88, 118-119, 133-136, 150, 159, 172-173, 179, 221-222, 320-321. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:66, 69-70, 218. Margoliouth (1905) 16-17, 47-48, 72.
- 15 Q2:185; 22:26-33. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 8-9, 22, 36, 38-39, 50, 87, 287. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 710 #124. Waqidi (Faizer) 302. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:293-294. Bukhari 3:34:266. Abu Dawud 10:1730. Tabari (Poonawala) 9:125. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:42, 326. Margoliouth (1905) 6. Tisdall (1905) 10-11. Guillaume (1960) 22-23. Kister (1980). Hajj (2011). Umrah (1998). Wensinck & Jomier (1960-2007).
- 16 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 82. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 710 #124. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:141-144. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:185.
- 17 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 57, 304. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:144-145. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:186, 188.
- 18 Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:143-144. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:185.
- 19 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 304. Waqidi (Faizer) 427. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:484-499. Tirmidhi, *Shamāʾil* 1:1-11, 13.
- 20 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 356. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:35, 109-110. Muslim 31:6140. Tabari (Landau-Tasseron) 39:196-197. Smith (1885, 1903) 99-100, 163-164.
- 21 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 82, 106, 135, 162, 287, 364, 484, 585. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 8. Waqidi (Faizer) 197, 485. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:145-147, 177-178; (Bewley) 8:10, 29, 67. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:48; (McDonald/Watt) 7:99. Heck (2003). *See also* Crone (2007). A camel was worth about £1,000.
- 22 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 19, 58, 82, 122, 128, 271, 641. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 8. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:76; (Bewley) 8:10. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:49. Heck (2003). *See also* Ibn Kathir, *Tafsīr* on Q106:2.

## *Life Begins at Forty*

**July 595 – August 610**

The merchant's name was Khadija and she was about 27 years old. She came from the Asad, who were the worst clan of the Quraysh, but being clever and determined, she had overcome this disadvantage. She had made a fortune by hiring agents to trade abroad then investing her profits; people said she owned half the trade in Mecca. After she became rich, people overlooked her unfortunate background and treated her with respect.

When Khadija's second husband died, suitors from all over the city lined up to marry her for her money. Her father would not let her accept any of them because he too wanted to keep control of her wealth.

Most of the suitors were already married, and it is quite likely that Khadija did not want to be one wife among several. She knew that if she married a poor man, she could use her money to bargain with him for the kind of life she wanted. In particular, if she chose a bachelor, she could arrange to remain his only wife. Muhammad – poor and single but handsome and clever – was ideal. Obviously her father would disapprove, so she needed to strategise.<sup>1</sup>

While Muhammad was sitting at the bazaar, he was greeted by a woman named Nafisa. She struck up conversation and asked, "Muhammad, why have you never married?"

"I can't afford it."

"But if money were no obstacle, would you accept a lady who was rich, respectable and beautiful?"

Muhammad, doubtless laughing, asked, "What lady is this?"

"Khadija!"

“Of course I would. But it’s impossible!”

“Leave that to me,” said Nafisa. She left Muhammad sitting in the bazaar, probably assuming that it was all a joke. He did not realise that Nafisa really was a friend of Khadija’s and that she had been sounding him out at her friend’s request.

The next time Khadija sent for Muhammad, and the flirtatious housemaid once again asked him if he was courting her mistress, Muhammad played along. “Yes!”

Yet Khadija did not discuss any trading assignment. “Cousin,”\* she said, “I like you, for we are from the same family, and everyone says you are trustworthy, good and truthful. So will you marry me?”

Once Muhammad understood that it was not a joke, he did not hesitate. Khadija was an attractive woman, and he could not afford to refuse good money.

She asked for a dower of twenty camels. This was expensive. Because the investment would be worth it, Muhammad promised to acquire the camels somehow. Most likely he asked his Uncle Abbas to help out. Within a few days, the twenty camels were ready.

Muhammad was still hanging around camels at the bazaar with his friend Ammar when a lady called them. Ammar, an ex-slave, went over, and she conferred with him. He reported back that the lady was Khadija’s sister Hala. She had asked, “Would your friend there like to marry Khadija?”

Muhammad sent Ammar back with the message, “Indeed I certainly would!”

“Then come to our house tomorrow.”<sup>2</sup>

On 16 July 595 Khadija and Hala slaughtered a cow and set it to

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\* Khadija was using the word “cousin” loosely because all the Quraysh were more or less cousins. Muhammad’s maternal grandmother had been her first cousin; but Arabs cared far more about paternal relations.

roast. Then they plied their father with wine until he was drunk. As was the custom, they covered his shoulders with a new striped cloak and dyed his beard yellow with saffron. When all was ready, Muhammad and his uncles entered the house and asked the old man for Khadija's hand in marriage.

He was too drunk to understand them, but at his daughters' prompting, he said yes. And they served roast beef to their guests.

As the party continued, Muhammad rewarded his slave Baraka by setting her free. It did not make much difference, for Baraka had never known any other home and she remained with Muhammad as a free servant for the rest of his life.

Khadija compensated Muhammad by making him a wedding present of one of her slaves. Zayd was a short, dark-skinned, flat-nosed boy from the Kalb tribe in the north. He had been kidnapped by slave-traders and sold at the Uqaz Bazaar, where Khadija's nephew had bought him on her behalf. Muhammad took Zayd into his service and became fond of him.

Hours later, Khadija's father awoke and asked, "Why am I wearing this cloak? What's going on?"

"It's my wedding day," she said. "You have married me off to Muhammad."

Just as she had expected, he was furious. "Never!" he shouted. "I rejected all your noble suitors, so would I have given you away to Abu Talib's orphan?" He brandished his sword and made so much fuss that some of Muhammad's relatives also brought out their weapons. Khadija needed to stop a fight.

"Father," she said, "don't make a fool of yourself in front of all the Quraysh by admitting that you were drunk. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" She kept on at him until he put his sword away.

It was too late. Muhammad was Khadija's husband.<sup>3</sup>

Muhammad and Khadija were very happy together. He was

naturally calm-tempered and cheerful. If he did become annoyed, he expressed it through silence or a mild rhetorical question such as, “What’s wrong with him? Dust his forehead!” Khadija was also placid: Muhammad later claimed that she never once shouted at or disagreed with him.

Wealthy Arab men usually had as many wives as they could afford; and Khadija came from a family where the women could have multiple husbands. Yet Muhammad and Khadija were faithful to each other. Perhaps this was a condition in their marriage contract: Khadija might have copied the type of contract that her own family used. This type of marriage also gave the woman equal divorce rights and custody of the children. Or perhaps they did not need to make a formal contract about fidelity, because Muhammad was intelligent enough to understand his real situation.

Marriage gave Muhammad the lifestyle of a rich man. He could indulge his taste for fine food and quality perfumes. Although he disliked dressing up in extravagant silks and brocades, which he said was only suitable for women, he did not like rags either. Now he could wear serviceable Yemenite garments woven in red, green and black stripes or dyed yellow with saffron. Perhaps he acquired his heart’s desire: a horse of his own. He enjoyed pleasant, easy work and instant status in the mercantile community. On the ninth day of the twelfth month, he would watch the religious ceremonies at Mount Arafat, sitting on his camel among all the other high-status men until it was time for them to race away together.

Yet before the law, he did not own a thing. Khadija remained in control of her money, and Muhammad was only her employee. If she chose, he could lose everything – wife, house, money, job, reputation, social status, influential friends and even children. If Muhammad wanted to keep his easy lifestyle, he needed to keep Khadija happy. So perhaps he was shrewd enough to obey her condition of fidelity without needing any formal obligation.

It did not cost him any real hardship, for Khadija made herself very



sexually available to him – and, of course, she was faithful too. In addition, he was careful never to annoy her and he always obeyed her wishes.<sup>4</sup>

After he was married, Muhammad lost interest in herding the camel-caravans. “Travelling is a kind of torture,” he confessed, “because it disrupts eating and sleeping. A man who has finished his business should return quickly to his family.” He probably did not need to go very often, for Khadija could afford to hire someone else.

Instead, Muhammad occupied a significant managerial role at the Meccan end of Khadija’s business. He went into partnership with Saïb, a nephew of her first husband, and sold merchandise in his shop. Muhammad said that Saïb was “an excellent partner, never ill-tempered or obstinate.”<sup>5</sup>

Besides managing the business, they brought up a dozen children. Khadija already had three: a daughter by her first husband and two sons by her second. The daughter was soon married off, but the sons, Harith and Hind, lived with Muhammad for several years. He liked to play with children and he got along well with his stepsons.

Muhammad’s first child was due before they had been married a year. Khadija hired a wet-nurse; and when a daughter was born, she sacrificed a goat to the gods in thanksgiving. They called the child Zaynab, which was Muhammad’s favourite name. A couple of years later, they had a second daughter, Ruqayya, who was destined to become a celebrated beauty.<sup>6</sup>

About the time Ruqayya was born, there was a juicy scandal in Mecca. The wealthy Fakih Makhzum claimed that his wife, also called Hind, had committed adultery with a bodyguard and so he divorced her. Hind swore by all the gods that she was innocent, and her father, the powerful Utba Abdshams, declared that he would hire a clairvoyant to settle the matter.

The Makhzum and Abdshams clans travelled to Yemen to meet



the fortune-teller. They were very impressed with him. First Utba asked, "What have I hidden?" and the clairvoyant correctly replied, "You've tied a grain of wheat to your colt."

Then he walked through the women, tapping each one on the shoulder and telling her to stand up. Nobody had mentioned which woman was consulting him or what her problem was, but when he reached Hind, his words were: "Arise, chaste woman! You are not an adulteress. You shall give birth to a great King."

Fakih was so convinced by the show that he offered to reinstate Hind as his wife. She scorned his advances, knocking his hand back with the words, "Go away! Some other man will be that King's father!"

Muhammad, who hated fortune-tellers, must have been surprised at how easily the Makhzum clan was fooled. Had they not stopped to think that the clairvoyant would collude with the man who was paying him? Hind was almost a princess in Mecca; it was highly likely that one of her sons would one day become high chief of the city. By the time that son was old enough for people to judge whether or not he qualified as a "great" chief, everyone who had met the clairvoyant would be dead.

The triumphant Hind had plenty of new suitors, and Utba gave her permission to choose her next husband herself. She had ample curves and exotic blue eyes; and, like Khadija, she was a businesswoman who managed her own money. After careful consideration, she accepted the proposal of her cousin Abu Sufyan. He was astute and strong-willed and he was in line to become chief of the Umayya, the most powerful and highest-ranking clan of all the Quraysh.

Since it was the wedding of the year in Mecca, Muhammad must have seen some of it. Hind was a scintillating display of necklaces, earrings, nose-rings, bangles, anklets and toe-rings of gold, emeralds, pearls and onyx, for she had hired the legendary jewels of the Abu'l-Huqayq Jews in Medina. Finally Muhammad was

impressed. He never forgot those fabulous jewels, although it was to be thirty years before he saw them again.<sup>7</sup>

Another member of the Makhzum clan was the sharp-faced, sharp-eyed man whom Muhammad had accidentally pushed under the table on the day they had sworn to the Extra Compact. The Quraysh were so impressed by the thin man's quick mind and quick tongue that they nicknamed him "Mr Clever". They invited him to join the council of elders when he was only thirty, although it was unheard-of to become an elder before age forty. Perhaps he owed the privilege to his Makhzum family connections, for the elders did not notice the clever young men in other clans. Muhammad, who was about the same age, was still only a shopkeeper. Later, when the two men clashed, Muhammad was to rename his antagonist "Mr Stupid".\*<sup>8</sup>

Muhammad and Khadija's third child was another daughter, Umm Kulthum, whose name means "chubby cheeks". Around 602 they finally welcomed their longed-for son, whom they named Qasim. Khadija sacrificed two goats for a boy. After this, polite people addressed Muhammad as *Abu Qasim* ("the father of Qasim"), according to the custom. Unfortunately, the little boy died when he was only seventeen months old.

Qasim died at the time of another famine in Mecca. Muhammad's Uncle Abu Talib could not afford to feed his family, so Muhammad offered to take charge of one of his children, and his three-year-old cousin Ali came to live with him. Muhammad always made a great show of affection toward Ali and loved him like a son, although he did not formally adopt him.

While the famine was at its height, a Bedouin woman knocked on their door, pleading her family's desperation. Muhammad recognised her as his foster-mother Halima, and Khadija, ever-

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\* This man's real name was Amru ibn Hisham. His friends called him *Abu'l-Hakam* (literally "Father of Judgment") and Muhammad called him *Abu Jahl* ("Father of Ignorance").

generous, presented her with forty sheep and a camel loaded with food.

By this time Khadija was pregnant again. She bore two more sons; as they are always mentioned together, they were probably twins. Muhammad named them Abdmanaf and Abdaluzza in the hope that the idols Manaf and Al-Uzza would favour them. Neither deity did a very good job, for both babies died before they were a year old.<sup>9</sup>

Muhammad's slave Zayd had become the head servant in the household. Muhammad treated him like a son. One day Zayd was at the Kaaba when he saw some familiar faces: among the pilgrims in Mecca there were people from his home-tribe. They soon recognised him as the long-lost Kalb child. Zayd gave them a message to tell his family that he was safe.

*Bear my message to my people, for I am far away.  
It's close to the Kaaba and pilgrimage-place that I stay  
with a family who are the noblest and the best  
in all Arabia. Praise the Lord, I'm blessed.  
So cast off your grief and don't let your sorrow run deep;  
no, don't send your camels in search the sands to sweep.*

Zayd had several weeks to discuss this surprising event with Muhammad, and they came to an understanding before they needed to make a formal decision. They must have expected that Zayd's family would ignore the last line of his poem; and before long, Zayd's father and uncle were in Mecca asking for Muhammad. They humbled themselves before him outside the Kaaba.

"O Son of Abdallah, son of the chief, you live under the protection of God's own temple! By His house you set prisoners free and feed the hungry! We've come to ransom a relative of ours, so deal with us kindly. We'll pay any amount for Zayd!"

"I have a better idea," said Muhammad. "We'll let Zayd decide. If

he chooses to go with you, you can have him back without paying anything at all. If he'd rather stay with me, I'm not the one to deny him his choice." Muhammad called Zayd and asked: "Do you recognise these people?"

"Yes. This one is my father and that one is my uncle."

"And I am the one whom you have known and lived with. So choose between me and them."

"I would never choose anyone in preference to you! You are like a father and uncle to me."

"Zayd, you can't mean it!" exclaimed his father. "Are you choosing slavery over freedom and your own family?"

"Yes, for I like Muhammad and I will never choose anyone rather than him."

Muhammad then took Zayd to the steps of the Kaaba and set him free before the assembled citizens. He declared: "O all ye who are present, witness that Zayd becomes my son! He is my heir and I am his."

The Arabs took adoption very seriously; Zayd's real father had to accept his choice and return home without him.

Zayd was a dutiful son to Muhammad for the next twenty years. Muhammad kept Zayd close to him and conferred many small favours on him.<sup>10</sup>

For a long time Muhammad and Khadija believed the old Arabian religion. Khadija kept an idol of Al-Uzza in her house, probably a crafted one bought from Abu Tujra, the professional idol-carver. Whenever the family members passed in or out of the front door, they touched Al-Uzza to absorb Her blessing. Just before lying down for the night, they would all bow down to Her.

Muhammad sometimes travelled a day's journey to Al-Uzza's shrine in Nakhla to sacrifice a white sheep to Her.<sup>11</sup> One year he took his son Zayd to Ta'if, where they sacrificed a sheep to Al-Lat

then used the meat as provision for their homeward journey. As they approached Mecca, Muhammad and his son chanced to meet Abu Saïd, the city outcast.

Abu Saïd only believed in a single Creator-God; he held that none of the others existed in any sense whatsoever. "This is the true religion of Abraham," he asserted, "and I'm the only person in Mecca who follows it!" He despised divining arrows and refused to eat animals that had died naturally. He had also preached the evils of killing unwanted babies; and he had put his money where his mouth was by rescuing a few baby girls and feeding them at his own expense. Because of these outspoken views, Abu Saïd's brother had hired a gang of ruffians and threatened to beat him up if he dared step over the boundaries into Mecca proper. So Abu Saïd now dwelt in caves in the surrounding mountains.

Muhammad told Zayd to offer the wild man some of their meat, but Abu Saïd told them that he never ate meat offered to idols. "Ask your aunts: they know that I want nothing to do with it, for idols are useless. They cannot do either good or evil. I have rejected both Al-Lat and Al-Uzza and I don't go to worship Hubal either."

This was the first time that anyone had rebuked Muhammad for worshipping idols. Yet he saw at once that Abu Saïd was right. Idols were just blocks of wood or stone: they were *less* important than himself, not more. As a result of this encounter, as Muhammad said: "I never again stroked an idol of theirs, nor did I sacrifice to them."<sup>12</sup> However, his religious doubts were not serious at this stage. For several more months or years, he only rejected the stone idols, not the gods whom they represented.

In 605 a flash-flood damaged the walls of the Kaaba and a thief stole some of the temple treasures. The Quraysh decided to rebuild the walls and roof them over. A convenient shipwreck had yielded enough wood for the task, and a carpenter who happened to be staying in Mecca lent his expertise. They divided themselves into four teams, one for each wall. Despite his doubts about the gods,

Muhammad shared the effort: his clan was on the team working near the door.

At first they were afraid to destroy the old temple, even for the purpose of protecting it. Eventually an elderly chief, Walid Makhzum, declared: "I will begin! Fear not, O Temple, for our intentions are good!" and he smashed his pick-axe against the wall. The next day the Quraysh saw that the gods had not wreaked any terrible punishment on the brave Walid, and so they all joined in razing the old walls down to the foundation. Then they gathered new stones, chiselled them and rebuilt the walls.

The holiest relic in the Kaaba was its cornerstone, a great black stone that was supposed to have been laid by the angel Gabriel. When the walls were high enough to hoist the Black Stone into its new home, everyone wanted the honour of installing it. The Quraysh quarrelled over it until they almost came to blows. Two clans even dipped their hands in a bowl of blood and swore to fight against the other clans to the death. Work on the rebuilding stopped for several days. The elders held counsel in the Kaaba courtyard yet still could not agree. Finally the high chief of Mecca told them that they needed to choose an umpire and they should appoint whoever next walked through the gate.

The next man to enter happened to be Muhammad. He placed the Black Stone on his cloak and told each team to hold one side of the cloak. That way they could all lift the Black Stone together and everyone would have installed it. Of course, one hand still had to give the final shove from the cloak to the wall, and that hand was Muhammad's. Nevertheless, the Quraysh liked this solution to their dispute, and Muhammad became even more popular among his neighbours.<sup>13</sup>

Soon after this, Abu Saïd the Monotheist returned from a trip to Syria. As he reached the outskirts of Mecca, he was assaulted and murdered. The culprit was never discovered, although suspicion fell on his brother.<sup>14</sup>



Late in that year Khadija bore another daughter. They named her Fatima after Khadija's mother and Abu Talib's wife. They did not manage to find a wet-nurse, so Khadija nursed the baby herself. Fatima looked like Muhammad and she became his favourite child.

By the time Fatima was weaned, Khadija was almost forty, so it is not surprising that she had no more children. Muhammad, the father of four daughters, was never to have a son who lived to grow up. Yet some years before he could have realised that this would happen to him, he had accepted Zayd and Ali along with Harith and Hind as his substitute sons.<sup>15</sup>

Ali had no hope of provision from his own father, for Abu Talib kept growing poorer. When his older brother died, he took over their father's duty of distributing holy water to the pilgrims at the Kaaba Temple. The salary that rewarded this task should have restored his fortunes; but he did not manage it well.

Abu Talib borrowed 10,000 silver coins\* from his brother Abbas and invested the money in supplying the pilgrims, but he did not attract enough returns. The next year he begged Abbas for another 14,000. The year after, when he still could not repay the money, he had to cede his rights over the Zamzam Well to Abbas. This deprived Abu Talib of his business and left his household harder-up than ever.

Abbas, of course, kept becoming richer. The Zamzam Well was just one more investment to add to his wealth.<sup>16</sup>

Muhammad bonded with Aunt Safiya's son Zubayr, who lived next door. One day Safiya found in the street a bruised and bleeding man with a broken hand. She was told that young Zubayr had been fighting him. Although pregnant, Safiya half-carried the man home, boasting, "How did you find Zubayr? Is he soft like cheese or full of brass?"

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\* The Arabian silver coin (*dirham*) was worth about £10; it was a day's wages. The gold goin (*dinar*) was worth about £100; it was the price of a goat.

Safiya's husband (Khadija's brother) died soon afterwards. She was undaunted by the challenges of single parenthood. The neighbours were alarmed at how harshly she beat Zubayr. "Are you trying to kill him? You'll break his spirit."

Safiya retorted, "I beat him to make him a bold warrior."

Her parenting strategy was a raging success, for Zubayr grew up to be a complete thug.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, the time came when Muhammad questioned the gods.

He was now a prominent citizen, and public figures attract controversy. When the crowd on the Kaaba steps shouted down something that Muhammad said, his stepson Harith leapt to speak in his defence. The quarrel became a fight. Harith was brought home so severely injured that he died a day or two later. This personal tragedy might well have shaken his parents' world-view.

Finally their unbelief was full-grown, and Muhammad confessed to his wife: "Khadija, I do not worship Al-Lat or Al-Uzza. By Allah, I do not worship Them at all."

Khadija calmly replied, "Then abandon Al-Lat and abandon Al-Uzza." She too had lost faith. They never prayed to their Al-Uzza idol again.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, they were not atheists. Like Abu Saïd the Monotheist, they still believed there must be a God. The idea of only one god – not *a* god, but just *God* – was not new. A few Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians and Sabians lived in or travelled through Mecca. Three of their own cousins had become Christians. It was probably these relatives who told Muhammad and Khadija about a Creator-God who had forbidden idols. Abu Saïd had called God "the Merciful", "the Lord" and "the Forgiving", and Muhammad began to use these titles too.

When Muhammad and Khadija talked about the One God, they called Him *Allah*. This name was an old one. Muhammad's own father had been named Abdallah ("slave of Allah"). Yet there was

no idol called “Allah” in the Kaaba. Most likely the word *Allah* (meaning “the God”) was another title for the chief god Hubal. However, Abu Saïd had worshipped Allah yet rejected Hubal; a Supreme Deity did not need a stone idol. In Muhammad’s mind also, the stone Hubal had become separate from the Creator-God. Like Abu Saïd, he nevertheless referred to the One God by the convenient title *Allah*.

It was probably the Christian cousins who explained to Muhammad that Allah interacted with people through holy books and prophets. He would resurrect dead people on Judgment Day and consign them to an afterlife of Heaven or Hell.<sup>19</sup>

Muhammad also noticed the Sabians. They were monotheists from Syria who believed in astrology. They prayed seven times a day – at daybreak, full sunrise, early afternoon, late afternoon, sunset, nightfall and midnight – with dramatic prostrations. For one month a year they fasted from before dawn until sunset; at the end of the month they celebrated the breaking of their fast with a festival called *Eid al-Fitr*. They had a holy book called *The Book of Seth*, which advocated truthfulness, courage and protection of strangers and forbade certain sins.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, Muhammad suffered increasingly from painful and exhausting seizures in which he sweated, turned ashen, saw flashing lights and heard sounds like the ringing of a bell. He complained of being seized by the “evil eye”. Khadija used to send for an elderly sorceress who knew how to charm it away. Whatever the real medical explanation for the fits, Muhammad connected them to his worship of Allah.<sup>21</sup>

He took to going on retreat in the month of Ramadan. It was a kind of camping holiday for his family. He would close up his shop and take them to the mountains around Mecca, where Abu Saïd the Monotheist had lived, then climb down to the valleys. At Mount Hiraa, about two miles out of town, he would pray, meditate and give food away to any poor people who approached

him there.

The dark side of these holidays was that his meditations made his seizures worse. He did not like other people to see his fits, so he would withdraw to a cave – possibly Abu Saïd’s own cave – away from his family, for days at a time, returning to camp only to collect food.

When Ramadan ended, he would mark his return to Mecca by walking around the Kaaba before entering his house. It did not occur to him that worship of Allah might not involve the Kaaba.<sup>22</sup>

The Quraysh disliked insults to their gods. They were tolerant of the small number of people with different religions; but they punished active disrespect. Abu Saïd had been persecuted by his more powerful brother; and there was also a man named Umayya Juma who tortured his Christian slave.

The slave, Bilal, was loud in his faith. Umayya threw him onto his back and pressed him into the hot noonday sands with a large rock on his chest, warning: “You will stay there until you worship Al-Lat and Al-Uzza or you die!” Bilal would not recant his faith but kept asserting, “One! One!” (presumably “one God”).

Since there were few unbelievers, and even fewer who were impolite over it, this kind of persecution was rare. Its tenacity took some citizens by surprise. Khadija’s cousin Waraqa passed the scene of Bilal’s torture and called out, “One, one, by God, Bilal!” Then he went to the Juma clan and warned them: “I swear that if you kill him in this way, I will make his tomb a shrine.” However, Waraqa was not an influential person in Mecca, and his pleas were ignored. It was none of an outsider’s business how Umayya Juma treated his own slave!<sup>23</sup>

Uncle Abu Talib reminded Muhammad that it was time for the family’s annual pilgrimage to the god Buwaana, who had an idol just outside the Kaaba. They usually offered sacrifices then shaved their heads and spent the night near the shrine.

“I’m not going,” said Muhammad. He made his uncle understand that he was not merely refusing the journey but that he had actually ceased his worship of Buwaana – and of all the other gods too.

Abu Talib was angry. His sisters were furious. Some of them warned: “We fear for your life when you show distaste to our gods.” Others cajoled: “Muhammad, don’t you like attending your family’s festival and being a member of our gathering?” They were still agitated when he left the house.

He did not go home. Nobody was sure where he was. Before anyone had time to worry about him, he returned to Abu Talib’s house in a state of terror. His aunts clustered around to console him, all anger forgotten, asking what was wrong.

“I think I’m going mad!”

“Impossible! Allah wouldn’t let the *jinn* control a good person like you. So what happened?”

“I went close to the idol, and a tall, white person appeared, crying out, ‘Don’t touch it!’”

Muhammad never enlarged on what he had seen. He made no comment on whether the “tall, white person” was a hostile human, a supernatural being or just a bad dream. Perhaps he invented the story because he could not put into words whatever had really happened. He made no link between this incident and any of his later adventures.

However it was, he never went to the Buwaana-festival again.<sup>24</sup>

While Muhammad was in this state of spiritual uncertainty, his daughters were growing up. One day Khadija came to him, urging him to “find a wife” for her favourite nephew, Lakit.

Muhammad was not very pleased: Khadija knew very well that the only marriageable girl in his care was their daughter Zaynab. Lakit was a rich and influential merchant of honourable character, and he and Zaynab had fallen in love. Muhammad did not consider

these good enough reasons to marry off his daughter into Khadija's disreputable clan: Lakit, who was Hala's son, was assumed to be illegitimate. However, as usual, Muhammad did not argue with Khadija, and the wedding took place. Khadija gave her daughter a distinctive onyx necklace and also a house of her own.

Muhammad wanted to follow the traditional Arab custom of marrying his daughters to his father's brothers' sons. Among his uncles was the handsome, elegant and generous Mr Redface,\* who lived next door. His children were of the correct age and social station, and Muhammad wasted no time in negotiating. Mr Redface agreed that his son Utba should marry Muhammad's daughter Ruqayya; and he gave away his daughter Durra to Zayd.

He did not find anyone for Umm Kulthum or Fatima. Perhaps he had already decided that, if nothing better turned up, Fatima could marry their cousin Ali. Since Ali was penniless, there was no danger that he would slip away to marry anyone else, so there was no need for a formal contract. He made a provision for Ali's future too, for somebody taught the boy to write; this may have been Muhammad's rich merchant-friend Abu Bakr.<sup>25</sup>

At about this time, something did turn up – something quite different. It changed the course of their lives and of all human history.

### **Summary**

- Muhammad married Khadija and so became a wealthy shopkeeper.
- He was respected among the neighbours for his clever settlement of a local dispute.
- Muhammad and Khadija lost faith in the traditional Arab religion. They concluded that there was only one God, Allah.

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\* Mr Redface's real name was Abdaluzza ibn Abdalmuttalib and his nickname was *Abu Labab* ("Father of Flame") because of his fiery red cheeks.

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**References and Notes to Chapter 2: *Life Begins at Forty*.**

1 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 82. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:147-149; (Bewley) 8:10. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:48-49. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 4:417. Majlisi (Rizvi) 2:193. Kister (1990). Kister (1993). The sources disagree about Khadija's age; she is variously said to have been 25, 28, 30, 35, 40 or 45. Age 28 is the tradition with the fewest problems attached (only 27 in solar years, of course). Interested readers are referred to my earlier work, *Unveiled*, which discusses the evidence in more detail.

2 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 82, 106, 107. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 8. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 972 #918. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:148-49. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:48-49, 73; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:189. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:192.

3 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 83. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 972 #918. Ibn Hanbal (Khattab) 3:16 #2849. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:149; (Bewley) 3:28, 31; 8:157-159. Muslim 19:4375. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:48-49; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:6, 10, 191-192. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:191-193. Kister (1993). Muir (1861) 2:24f.

4 Q93:3, 6, 8. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 82, 88, 106, 107, 111, 313. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 711 #127; 972 #918. Ibn Hanbal (Cairo) 6#24908. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:150, 428, 432-433, 468-471; (Bewley) 8:10. Bukhari 7:62:58; 7:72:703, 704. Muslim 31:5975. Abu Dawud 32:4021a, 4038, 4051, 4052, 4053, 4054, 4055, 4057, 4062. Tirmidhi 6:46:3641. Tirmidhi, *Shama'il* 34:217. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:73. Dhahabi 1 #69; 2 #107. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 2:89-90; 4:437. Smith (1885, 1903) 290.

5 Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 747 #520. Bukhari 7:65:340.

6 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 83. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:150-151; (Bewley) 8:10, 21. Muslim 25:5336. Tabari (Poonawala) 9:127; (Donner) 10:18-19. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 4:436-437. Suyuti (Jarrett) 155. Guillaume (1960) 46, 49. Kister (1993). *See also* Malik 9:24:84. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:27-28. Bukhari 1:9:495; 8:73:150, 151. Muslim 4:1107. Confusingly, Khadija's daughter from her first marriage was also named Hind; and a son who died in infancy was also named Abdmanaf. The contradictory reports about her second marriage produce even more confusion. It is possible that Harith was her husband's son by another wife; he may have also been known as Hala; or this name might refer to a daughter who died in infancy; and she may also have been known as Zaynab. The earliest tradition asserts that Khadija bore Muhammad several daughters before any of the sons (Guillaume (1960) 49). Later historians, who propose every possible variant of their birth-orders, must be treated with some scepticism, as they had a vested interest in claiming that Ruqayya and Umm Kulthum were younger than Ibn Ishaq implies (*see* chapter 5).

7 Waqidi (Faizer) 132, 330-331. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:225; 2:132, 140; (Bewley) 8:165-166. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:43. Tabari (Smith) 14:133-134. Suyuti (Jarrett) 200-202.

8 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 119, 201. Margoliouth (1905) 153.

9 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 70, 83. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:126, 150-151; (Bewley) 8:10, 151-152. Bukhari 4:52:219. Muslim 1:141; 31:5917. Tirmidhi 6:46:3719, 3724. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:81, 83; (Poonawala) 9:127. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 4:436-437. Guillaume (1960) 49. Kister (1993). The earliest traditions list three sons: Qasim, Tahir and Tayyib. Aisha's grand-nephew Hisham claimed that the two younger sons were really called Abdmanaf and Abdaluzza but that the embarrassed scholars of Iraq had piously renamed them (Kister, 1993). Ibn Saad (Haq, 1:150) says that *Tahir* ("pure") and *Tayyib* ("perfumed") were both by-names for one son, whose real name was the safely Islamic *Abdallah*. Perhaps this denial of Abdaluzza's existence was an honest mistake; or perhaps it was the easiest way to wipe out a second embarrassing name. Claims that one or more of these children were

born “after Islam” also seem to be pious additions that are not supported by the earliest sources.

10 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 115, 186, 308, 314-315, 364, 660, 662, 664. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:28-33; 8:72. Bukhari 5:53:324; 5:59:562. Muslim 8:3441. Abu Dawud 12:2271. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:8, 16; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:6-11.

11 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 38. Ibn al-Kalbi (Faris) 16-17. Waqidi (Faizer) 428. Ibn Hanbal (Cairo) 4#17976. Guillaume (1960) 27-28.

12 Q81:8-9. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 38, 66-67, 99-103. Ibn al-Kalbi (Faris) 14-15, 19. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:296-298. Bukhari 5:58:169; 7:67:407. Nasāi 5:37:4020. Guillaume (1960) 27-28. Kister (1970). Smart (1997) “Allat” in *Encyclopaedia Mythica*. Lindemans (1999) “Hubal” in *Encyclopaedia Mythica*.

13 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 84-86. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 7-8. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:164-166. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:197. Guillaume (1960) 23-25.

14 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 102-103. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:298.

15 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 83. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 128. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:150-151; (Bewley) 8:9, 10, 13. Bukhari 4:56:819. Abu Dawud 19:2982; 42:5198. Tirmidhi 6:46:3868, 3874. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 4:436-437. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q66:11. Guillaume (1960) 49. Fatima is the only one of Muhammad’s children whose birth-date is recorded. Cumulative and consistent evidence places it in December 605 or January 606.

16 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 79, 113, 114, 202, 309-310, 312-313, 520, 651. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:90. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:125.

17 Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:76, 78. *See* Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 513-514, 515. Waqidi (Faizer) 252, 331. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:163. Qurtubi, *Tafsir* on Q4:34. Zamakhshari 1 #275 on Q4:34. Ibn Hajar, *Isaba* 8 #11448.

18 Ibn Hanbal (Cairo) 4#17976. Tabari (Landau-Tasseron) 39:79-80. Ibn Hajar, *Isaba* 1#1503. Kister (1993).

19 Q2:62; 5:69; 22:17. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 3, 68-69, 90, 99-103, 106. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:106-108; (Bewley) 8:68. Tabari (Landau-Tasseron) 39:177. Tisdall (1905) 14, 36, 82. Guillaume (1960) 21. *Hubal* and *Allah* are used interchangeably (Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 67, 70); by 625 Muhammad’s enemies clearly distinguished Muhammad’s idea of Allah from their idea of Hubal (Ibn Ishaq 386); and in 630 Muhammad smashed Hubal along with the rest of the idols (Ibn Ishaq 552).

20 Tisdall (1905) 9, 14-15.

21 Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:224, 227-228. Bukhari 1:1:3. Muslim 1:301. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:67. Guillaume (1960) 29.

22 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 105-106. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:224, 227-228. Bukhari 1:1:3. Muslim 1:301. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:67, 70. Tisdall (1905) 81.

23 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 99-100, 102-103, 118, 143-144. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:178.

24 Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:180; 2:169. Tisdall (1905) 70.

25 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 195, 313, 314, 316-317. Waqidi (Faizer) 66. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:100, 232; (Bewley) 3:32; 8:13, 18, 21-24, 26. Baladhuri (Murgotten) 2:271-272. Bukhari 6:60:478. Muslim 31:6002. Tabari (Landau-Tasseron) 39:167, 282. Dhahabi 1#69. Smith (1885, 1903) 120, 163-164. Vacca (1960-2007). Guillaume (1960) 50. Lakit is also known as *Abu’l-Asi*, *Miqsam*, *Hushaym* and *Yasir*. He was probably not illegitimate in the strict sense; he seems to have been born to a polyandrous marriage, leaving his biological paternity in doubt. Polyandry was still legal in Mecca but it had become decidedly unfashionable.



## *The Angel in the Cave*

**August 610 – November 613**

On Saturday 11 August 610, when Muhammad was 39 years old, his family was on their usual Ramadan camping holiday on Mount Hira. Muhammad was returning to base from one of his solitary episodes when he had a spectacular fit. This time it was not just ringing noises and light-flashes. As he explained it afterwards, he heard a voice calling, “O Muhammad, I am Seraphiel!” and he saw an angel enthroned on the horizon.

Terrified, he decided that he must have gone mad and that he must kill himself at once. He began to climb the mountain so that he could hurl himself off a cliff, but half-way up the angel appeared again, saying: “Muhammad, thou art Allah’s Messenger!”

Muhammad stopped in his tracks, distracted from his thoughts of suicide and seeing Seraphiel everywhere, no matter in which direction he looked. He saw his servants, sent by Khadija to search for him, but they did not notice him. They returned to Khadija at camp to report their failed errand, and still Muhammad was staring at the sky. At last Seraphiel disappeared. Muhammad fell to his knees and crawled back to his family, his shoulders shaking and his heart beating wildly.

He reached Khadija, still terrified, and threw himself down close to her. “Where have you been?” she asked. “I sent messengers to look for you all the way to Mecca and back.”

“Cover me up!” he begged. “Cover me up!”

Khadija wrapped his cloak around him and poured water over his forehead. While he was lying in this feverish state, words came to him that he identified as Seraphiel’s message from Allah.

*O you who covers himself, arise and warn!*

*And your Lord glorify,  
and your clothing purify and uncleanness avoid.*<sup>1</sup>

The next day Muhammad returned to his cave. That night, he said, he dreamed that Seraphiel reappeared carrying a brocade cloth covered with writing and commanding, “Recite!” Muhammad replied, “I cannot recite.” Then Seraphiel seized him and squeezed him until he was almost suffocated.

When Seraphiel released him he repeated, “Recite!” Again Muhammad pleaded incapacity, and again Seraphiel was so violent that Muhammad was nearly stifled. A third time Seraphiel demanded a recitation, Muhammad refused, and Seraphiel showed him the same violence.

When Seraphiel commanded, “Recite!” for the fourth time, Muhammad, afraid of being suffocated again, asked, “What shall I recite?” The angel said:

*“Recite in the name of your Lord who created –  
created man from a clinging substance.  
Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous –  
who taught by the pen –  
taught man that which he knew not.”*<sup>2</sup>

He repeated the words, and Seraphiel disappeared. Muhammad awoke to find the words still impressed on his heart.<sup>3</sup>

In the morning he hurried back to his family’s camp, exclaiming, “Khadija, I’m in fear of my life! I think I’ve gone mad! I see light and I hear sounds. I think I’m turning into a fortune-teller.”

“Never!” she replied. “Allah would not disgrace you like that, for you have never done anything wrong. You’re always truthful, trustworthy, noble, persevering, family-minded, hospitable, charitable and ready to help people in trouble. That isn’t what’s happening. So what did you see?”

After he had told her about his nightmare, she responded: “Be glad and stand firm! I have hope that you are the prophet of this

community.”

Khadija then put on her cloak and went to the city to consult her cousin Waraqa.\* He had spoken to Christian scholars and had translated part of the Gospels into Arabic; but he had not read them recently, for he had become blind. Nevertheless, he was Mecca’s greatest expert on Christianity; he seemed very learned compared with illiterate neighbours who knew nothing at all.

Waraqa’s words were less reassuring than Khadija had hoped. “My dear, I just don’t know. Send Muhammad to me so that I may hear more about whatever he saw. I’m afraid it may not have been an angel. There are certain devils who imitate angels† and in this way deceive and corrupt people. Even a healthy-minded person can become confused or go mad.”

Khadija did not want to believe that Muhammad’s visions meant anything sinister. She returned to Mount Hira and passed on the message, or some form of it. Whatever she said to Muhammad, his anxiety subsided a little. Ramadan ended, and the family returned to Mecca on 30 August.<sup>4</sup>

There was not much to do in the shop, for the spring’s imports from Syria had all been sold and it was still too hot to prepare the camels for the autumn journey to Yemen. Muhammad and Khadija later claimed that they indeed visited Waraqa at this time. If they did, we have only their word for whatever he said to them.

At home, Khadija worked on strengthening her husband’s resolve. When he next told her that Seraphiel had arrived and was in the room with them, he was still disturbed about it.

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\* This was the same Waraqa who had found Muhammad and brought him home when he was lost in Mecca at the age of five. He was also the man who had protested against the torture of the slave Bilal.

† Waraqa was probably quoting II Corinthians 11:14: “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.” It is unlikely that Khadija recognised the quote or remembered the exact words.

“Sit on my left,” she said. “Can you still see him?” He said yes. “Move around to sit on my right ... Can you still see him?” He said yes. “Move around and sit in my lap ... Can you still see him?” When he still said yes, she was upset – it was not what she had planned. She gave him something else to think about by stripping off all her clothes and pulling him into an embrace. “Can you still see him?”

“No.”

“Be glad,” she said. Since Seraphiel was too modest to watch their foreplay, “this must be an angel and not a devil.”<sup>5</sup>

Muhammad became confident enough to declare that Seraphiel had brought another coherent revelation:

*Nun.\* By the pen and what they inscribe,  
you are not, by the favour of your Lord, a madman.  
And indeed, for you is a reward uninterrupted.  
And indeed, you are of a great moral character.  
So you will see and they will see  
which of you is the afflicted.*<sup>6</sup>

However, he was still not sure how a prophet was supposed to behave. A few days later, the elderly Waraqa died. Seraphiel for some reason stopped appearing. Muhammad suffered no more seizures, saw no more visions and heard no more divine messages.

Perhaps he really had experienced those first few “prophecies” as a voice in his head and not as something that he had made up himself. Perhaps the angel enthroned in the sky or haunting his living room had been some kind of hallucination and not an outright fiction. If so, Muhammad was now well again; he did not see or hear anything out of the ordinary. He could not think of anything to prophesy.

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\* This is a letter of the Arabic alphabet. Muhammad was never able to explain why so many of his prophecies began with random letters of the alphabet. It was a mystery from Allah.

Instead of being relieved that her husband no longer felt he was going mad, Khadija was dismayed. She had expected and desired to launch a prophet, and now Muhammad was refusing to prophesy. Her hopes were shattered.

More weeks passed with no news from Allah. Khadija's patience gave out and she taunted Muhammad: "Your Lord has deserted you! I think He must have come to hate you."

This unusual lack of sympathy from Khadija tormented Muhammad far more than his fears about angels and madness. His original terror of Seraphiel forgotten, he was now distressed that his visions had gone. He could not please his wife unless he produced something and he had no idea what she required of him. If she dropped any hints, Muhammad could not understand them. He became despondent.

He again contemplated suicide. More than once he climbed the mountains intending to throw himself off a cliff; but (as he later said) Seraphiel would mysteriously reappear in time to remind him: "Thou art Allah's prophet!" Then he would calm down and try to deal with life again.

Finally he returned to Mount Hiraa, where he had first seen the angel, and wandered among the caves and gullies. On that day he decided to live and he decided to be a prophet. He never told anyone how he reached this conclusion: that would have meant confessing his fear of Khadija, his fear of death and his fear of being a prophet all at once. He presumably overcame all those fears by deciding that it was possible to be a prophet and that he would find a way to conduct a mission from Allah.

When he came home, he reported that he had again seen Seraphiel enthroned on the horizon, and he declared a pointed new prophecy that was addressed to Khadija.

*By the morning brightness  
and the night when it covers with darkness,*

*your Lord has not taken leave of you,  
nor has He detested you.*<sup>7</sup>

After this, there was no more hesitating. Muhammad never again mentioned being afraid of the angel or doubting whether he was a prophet.<sup>8</sup>

Soon he returned from another hike in the mountains saying that he had seen Seraphiel again. The angel dug his heel into a dry river-bed and a stream of water had gushed out. Then Seraphiel had demonstrated the correct prayer ritual. Muhammad took Khadija by the hand and brought her out to the same spring. There he taught her the ritual and she copied it.

First they purified themselves by washing their faces, rinsing their mouths, sniffing water up their nostrils, wiping their heads, ears, feet and ankles and sprinkling their clothes. Then they stood facing the direction of the Kaaba with arms raised. Then they prostrated, dropping to the toes, knees, hands, nose and forehead, and recited Seraphiel's prayer. They lifted their heads and hands until they were sitting up high enough to prostrate a second time. Then they stood: that was one unit of prayer. They prayed a second unit, four prostrations in all.

Muhammad later claimed that Seraphiel had also told him the correct times for the prayers.

### **The Five Daily Prayers**

1. Dawn: between daybreak and sunrise.
2. Midday: at any time between noon and mid-afternoon.
3. Afternoon: at any time between mid-afternoon and sunset.
4. Sunset: between sunset and dusk.
5. Evening: between nightfall and bedtime.<sup>9</sup>

Khadija was pleased with the ritual, and so Muhammad's mind was

finally at rest. He felt he had received a real message from Allah and that he was truly a prophet. Perhaps he decided that “making it up” was what all prophets did because Allah was somehow guiding their imaginations. Muhammad and Khadija both understood that the full-body prostrations symbolised their complete submission to Allah. So the new faith was born. Its fundamental concept was *islam* – “submission”.<sup>10</sup>

After that Muhammad reported regularly that Seraphiel brought new and strong revelations from Allah. The next time he suffered from the “evil eye” and Khadija asked if she should call in the sorceress, he replied, “Not for the time being.” It was during the seizures, he said, that the angel spoke; for the rest of his life, he often fell into a convulsion before proclaiming a new prophecy. At other times, however, the angel appeared to him in human form and spoke to him in natural conversation.

That November Uncle Abbas saw Muhammad standing, with his cousin Ali on his right and Khadija a pace behind them, in full public view at sunrise. First they bowed in the direction of the Kaaba; then they stood upright; then they prostrated right down, with their foreheads touching the ground. Abbas had to explain to a friend: “I do not know anyone on the face of the earth who follows this religion except these three.”<sup>11</sup>

In fact Muhammad had more followers than two, for all his children, including the faithful Zayd, converted immediately. So did the servant Baraka, the abused slave Bilal and – if her own word is to be believed – Uncle Abbas’s bride Lubaba.

Muhammad was touched by Baraka’s enthusiastic faith. “If any man wants to marry a woman who is certain to go to Heaven,” he said, “he should marry Baraka!”

His son Zayd volunteered for the honour, even though he already had one wife and Baraka must have been well into her forties. They nevertheless produced a son, Usama, whom Muhammad always regarded as his own grandson.

Outside Muhammad's immediate family, however, Islam had a slow start. When he told his uncles that he was a prophet of Allah's mercy, Hamza ignored him. Mr Redface was disbelieving and hostile. Abbas was bemused but not interested in any venture that might demand his precious money. Abu Talib, although giving Ali permission to do what he liked, said: "I don't want a religion that makes me lift my buttocks higher than my brains!"<sup>12</sup>

The big breakthrough came when an adult male outside the family took Muhammad seriously. Abu Bakr, a near neighbour from the Taym clan of the Quraysh, was bow-backed and gaunt-faced, his beard dyed a startling blood-red. He was a successful cloth merchant, easy-tempered, sociable and very popular. Because he had memorised a vast store of information on many topics, people liked to sit and talk with him.

Abu Bakr called on Muhammad to ask why he had not been involved in civic affairs lately. "We've missed you, Abu Qasim. Is it true that you have abandoned our gods?"

"Yes," said Muhammad. "I am Allah's Messenger and Prophet. He sent me to deliver His message and invite you to Allah. I call on you, Abu Bakr, to worship Allah alone and none other and to devote yourself to obeying Him."

Abu Bakr was fascinated. He renounced his idols on the spot and went home a believer.<sup>13</sup>

Muhammad's new best friend attached himself so firmly to the cause that there could be no turning back. Indeed, Islam might never have succeeded if Abu Bakr had not at that time appointed himself as Muhammad's chief assistant. He became the head evangelist, telling everyone in his discussion circle about his faith and inviting all his friends to Islam. None of them converted as quickly as Abu Bakr himself; they all showed some scepticism before making up their minds. Yet he made new converts (*Muslims* or "submitters") at a rate of one every three weeks, and over fifty people became Muslims through his preaching.



### Memorable Early Muslims

*Ages are for the year 611, when the first seven on this list became Muslims. The rest were converted later, though all of them before 616.*

1. **Bilal**, age 29, a Christian slave, is not on the list of Abu Bakr's converts. He became the Muslims' prayer-caller.
2. **Uthman Umayya**, age about 32, was very rich and aristocratic. He was Muhammad's cousin's son.
3. **Abdallah Zuhra**, age 31, was an enterprising merchant related to Muhammad's mother.
4. **Saad Zuhra**, age 16, was also related to Muhammad's mother.
5. **Zubayr Asad**, age 17, was Khadija's nephew and the son of Muhammad's Aunt Safiya.
6. **Talha Taym**, age 17, was Abu Bakr's cousin and a very rich merchant.
7. **Arqam Makhzum**, age about 14, was the owner of the community house.
8. **Khabbab**, age 25, a poor swordsmith, was a vassal of a vassal of the Zuhra clan.
9. **Hakima al-Nahdiya** and **her daughter** were nieces of Khadija who had become slaves.
10. **Saïd Adiy**, age about 12, was the son of Abu Saïd the Monotheist and the cousin and brother-in-law of Umar.
11. **Ibn Masud**, age about 17, was a poor shepherd.
12. **Ammar**, age 44, with his parents **Yasir** and **Sumayya**, were freed slaves of the Makhzum clan.
13. **Musaab Abdaldar**, age about 26, was a gentleman of leisure, famous for his easy temper.<sup>14</sup>

Of the people who were converted in the first few years, over twenty were related to Muhammad, either his dependants or his cousins. A similar number were the merchants in Abu Bakr's discussion circle, together with their families. At least forty were poor people: slaves, ex-slaves or vassals. A few were impressionable youths who had a friend in one of the other categories.<sup>15</sup> There were perhaps a hundred Muslims altogether.

When Abu Bakr introduced a convert to the Prophet, Muhammad gave a *Quraan* ("reciting") of his prophecies to confirm that Allah was the only God. The new Muslim then declared: "I testify that there is no god but Allah alone without associate. I disavow Al-Lat and Al-Uzza and renounce rivals." Then they all performed the prayer ritual.<sup>16</sup>

Early Islam was simple: a convert could learn the beliefs in ten minutes.

### **The Basics of Islam**

1. Allah is the only God. The other gods do not exist.
2. After you die, you will go to Judgment Day, and Allah will decide whether to send you to Hell or Heaven.
3. Non-Muslims will go to Hell, which is a pit of fire.
4. A Muslim who avoids serious sins will go to Heaven, which is a beautiful garden.
5. Sins committed before you were a Muslim or punished on earth are forgiven. If you commit a serious sin after your conversion and escape the punishment, it will be up to Allah whether He forgives you or not.
6. Allah has sent Muhammad as His prophet to explain all this.<sup>17</sup>

Why were the earliest Muslims attracted to Islam? First of all,

unlike the Arabian religion, it promised an afterlife in Heaven. It must have comforted the slaves and paupers to trust that this life's suffering would not be all that ever happened to them.

Second, the idea that there was only one God was philosophically appealing. It made sense that only one Being could have created the world. That explains why the early converts included Saïd Adiy and Bilal, who were already monotheists.<sup>18</sup>

Third, the list of Islamic sins and virtues was as simple as Islamic doctrine. Anyone who had a little common sense and self-control could keep the rules and be sure of going to Heaven.

#### **Islamic Morality**

1. Do not worship idols.
2. Keep the prayer ritual correctly.
3. Do not eat animals that die naturally.
4. Do not steal.
5. Do not fornicate.
6. Do not kill your children.
7. Do not slander.
8. Help poor Muslims generously.
9. Obey the Prophet in what is right.<sup>19</sup>

The rule about obeying the Prophet suggested that Muhammad might sometimes give specific instructions but that the Muslims still had freedom of conscience. In fact they had this freedom anyway, since Muhammad had no authority in Mecca, so there was nothing that he could do to any Muslim who broke his rules. The earliest "Islamic law" was not imposed on the Muslims by Muhammad; it was only the type of law that each Muslim could impose on himself.<sup>20</sup>

Fourth, Muhammad's words about Allah and Heaven sounded plausible because he could name the Jewish and Christian prophets and claim to be the latest in line. In fact he knew next to nothing about Judaism or Christianity; but nor did anyone else in Mecca, so nobody noticed his mistakes. Since the Meccans could not read, a live prophet in their own city was much more accessible than something written in an old book.

For his status as a Christian prophet, Muhammad cited the authority of Khadija's cousin Waraqa. Khadija regretted having repeated Waraqa's incriminating words about devils imitating angels. She now changed her story. "Waraqa said: 'Holy, holy! If this is true, then the same angel whom Allah sent to Moses has visited Muhammad! Your husband is a prophet, so tell him to stand firm, for he should think only good of it.'"

Their story sprouted extra details over time. Muhammad added that as they had returned to Mecca after their month in the mountains, he had as usual gone to walk seven times around the Kaaba. "I met Waraqa there. He said: 'Nephew, tell me what you saw or heard.' I told him about it. He said, 'You must be a prophet.' Waraqa's words strengthened my resolve to carry out the prophetic mission."

He said that he and Khadija had visited Waraqa's house together; but if this was a third conversation, nothing new was said.

Muhammad's claim of Waraqa's endorsement was a weak one. Waraqa had died at a very convenient time, after the children and the servants had seen Muhammad terrified of his visions but before he had told anyone else that he was a prophet. The household might have testified that he had indeed calmed down after going out to visit someone; but nobody had had time to ask Waraqa what exactly he had said before he was dead. Muhammad and Khadija were the only witnesses that they had even gone to Waraqa's house, let alone that Waraqa had said anything about prophets.

Khadija added details about a monk and a Christian slave who had both agreed that Seraphiel was “Allah’s trusted servant and His envoy to His prophets, the companion of Moses and Jesus.” She also claimed that she had discerned Muhammad’s special status years earlier, when they were newlyweds. “Waraqa told me, ‘I knew that a prophet of this people was to be expected. His time has come.’ He was impatient: he kept asking Allah how much longer he’d have to wait.”

Someone inevitably asked: “So was Waraqa a Muslim?”

Muhammad was thrown. He did not know how to answer the question.

Khadija prompted him. “He believed in you but he died before you appeared as a prophet.”

Muhammad then embellished Khadija’s prompt. “I dreamed I saw Waraqa wearing white robes. I don’t think he would have been dressed like that if he had gone to Hell.”

Muhammad had another certain proof that he was a prophet. Every prophet carried a mark on his body. Ali, among others, testified that Muhammad had a reddish mole, about the size of a pigeon’s egg, between his shoulder-blades.

Muhammad talked about the previous prophets. “Abraham looked like me,” he claimed. “Moses was tall and thin with a red face, curly hair and a hooked nose; he rode a camel. Jesus was fair and freckled with greasy hair.”

Muhammad taught that Abraham, ancestor of all the Arabs, had built the Kaaba. He had prayed and sacrificed to Allah there just as they did. The idols, he said, had been brought there later by polytheists who had corrupted Abraham’s pure religion. Allah had not sent Muhammad with a new religion but with the task of restoring the old one.

The Meccans had nobody to tell them that the Kaaba was only about 400 years old while Abraham had died over 2,500 years ago.

They had heard about Abraham from the Jews, and Muhammad's story sounded plausible. Nevertheless, those old prophets had to be put in their proper place, for Muhammad was the most important of them. "I have been commissioned for all mankind. There will be no more prophets after me."<sup>21</sup>

He began his prophecies with the imposing phrase: "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful." This echoed the Zoroastrian formula: "In the name of God, the Giver, the Forgiver, the Merciful, the Just." Most of the prophecies were short poems with catchy rhythms that were easy to memorise.

The early revelations called the community to worship Allah.

*Say: He, Allah, is one.  
Allah is He on Whom all depend.  
He begets not, nor is He begotten.  
And none is like Him.*<sup>22</sup>

*In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.  
All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds,  
the Beneficent, the Merciful,  
Master of the Day of Judgment.  
Thee do we serve and Thee do we beseech for help.  
Keep us on the right path,  
the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favours,  
not of those upon whom Thy wrath is brought down,  
nor of those who go astray.*<sup>23</sup>

*And remember the name of your Lord  
and devote yourself to Him with devotion.  
The Lord of the East and the West – there is no god but He –  
therefore take Him for a protector.*<sup>24</sup>

The arrival of a plausible prophet, with all his talk of an afterlife, only one God, common-sense morality, live prophecies and apparent continuity with earlier prophets, explained a great deal. However, there was also a different type of reason why Islam

attracted converts.

The Muslims shared a prayer ritual every day. A shared ritual can bond people together even if the ritual means nothing at all. A ritual that represents a shared faith and that is repeated every single day, several times a day, creates a powerful bond. The rote-learned, quotable prophecies were another bond: they gave the Muslims a common literature, with allusions and in-jokes that outsiders did not understand. The Muslims felt themselves to be a new and special community, with everyone else in Mecca being outsiders.

Within this new community, Muhammad was a charismatic personality who projected sincerity and reliability. His followers felt honoured by his attention and cherished every souvenir of him, even a hair that fell from his head. The Quraysh elder Abu Sufyan observed, "I have never seen a man whose companions loved him as much as Muhammad's love him." Muhammad was a leader who was bound to attract followers as soon as he had a cause. Obviously religion was a better cause than shopkeeping.

Muhammad taught that loyalty to Allah's own community was a higher priority than traditional loyalties to tribe and family. He instructed the Muslims to break off their friendship with anyone who opposed his message, even their own fathers, sons or brothers. Just like the Extra Compact, Islam allowed people from unhappy families to defy the family without feeling guilty about it. Families did in fact break up as young men gave their loyalty to Islam in preference to their father, brother or wife.

Similarly, the new community gave Muslim slaves and paupers a group of more powerful friends who might protect them against abuse or poverty.<sup>25</sup>

Muhammad was wise in his timing of his prophecies. He did not pester his followers with orders and doctrines at all hours. He waited until a time when they were not tired or distracted by other responsibilities, and when he spoke, he knew when to stop. He was an engaging speaker, and the Muslims hung on his words.

Before he died, he was to produce a litany of rituals and regulations that were almost impossible to learn and became a crushing burden to anyone who made a serious effort to obey all of them. However, this had not happened yet. Muhammad had the sense to keep some of his practices optional.

One issue that arose early was the problem of night prayers. With a restless energy, Muhammad used to awaken in the middle of the night for extra prayers. His ideal was to be like the Prophet David, who, he said, had slept for half the night, then prayed for a third, and slept again for the final sixth. Muhammad's schedule was less precise; he felt the exact time or length of the prayer did not matter. The exact words did not matter either. The prayer might run like this.

*O Allah! All praises are for Thee.  
Thou art the Holder and the Light  
and the King of the Heavens and the Earth and of whatever is in them.  
I surrender to Thee; I believe in Thee; I repent to Thee;  
with Thine aid I argue; and I take Thee as Judge.*

On a long night, he would pray as many as thirteen units. Between the 26 prostrations he stood reciting his prophecies. These hours of rehearsing might explain how he memorised the Quraan; without the advantage of a written record, he never had any trouble remembering his complete collection of prophecies. Some nights he stood so long in prayer that his feet swelled in pain and his prayer-companions were tempted to sit down without him.

The best Muslims, who also observed the night prayer, could congratulate themselves on their spirituality, for it was the voice of Satan that lulled people into sleeping through the whole night. Nevertheless, night prayers were not compulsory. Muslims who needed their sleep could admire Muhammad's spirituality without being harassed by extra demands or false guilt.<sup>26</sup>

At first Muhammad preached discreetly, and the Muslims met together in private. As more people converted, Islam became a



general topic of conversation all over Mecca, but nobody really minded. The elders only observed: "That young man claims to hear a voice from Heaven!"<sup>27</sup>

There was a social ripple when a Muslim convert, Uthman Umayya, proposed marriage to Muhammad's daughter Ruqayya. Uthman was aristocratic and very rich; he was also handsome, with long curls and a luxuriant beard that he dyed saffron-yellow. Yet Muhammad proudly advised that he did not allow his daughters to live beside rival-wives. Undeterred, Uthman divorced his existing wife, who was Mr Stupid's daughter; and Muhammad gave him the dazzling Ruqayya. This snub to both Mr Stupid's family and Uthman's own – that is, to most of Mecca's polite society – could not be ignored, for Uthman was articulate and was always spreading the message of Islam among his friends.

Muhammad did not forget his promise to Utba, son of Mr Redface; he gave him his third daughter, Umm Kulthum. Unfortunately, this did not persuade Utba or his father to take any interest in Islam.<sup>28</sup>

After about three years, Muhammad was confident in himself and in his followers. He changed the new convert's declaration of faith to: "I testify that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His servant and messenger." It was no longer sufficient to proclaim the unity of Allah; true faith required an acknowledgement of Allah's prophet on earth.

With confidence came ambition. He reasoned that if Allah was the only god who existed, it followed that none of the imaginary gods had any right to be acknowledged in the Kaaba. If Allah was to be the sole Lord of the Kaaba, the best person to instate His worship there was His own Prophet. Of course, if Muhammad ever did gain control of the Kaaba, then he would also be high chief of all Mecca. And so Islam became a political movement.<sup>29</sup>

In 613 Muhammad announced that Allah would not send Seraphiel to him again; He had replaced him with a different angel named Gabriel. Perhaps someone had advised him that there was no

Seraphiel in the Bible. Muhammad was embarrassed that he had changed the name of the angel. In later years, when he re-told the story of meeting an angel in Mount Hira, he never mentioned Seraphiel but only referred to Gabriel. It was a needless worry. If Allah's ways were high and mysterious, He might have rearranged His angelic rosters without explaining His reasons; so Muhammad's attempt to cover up the change was far more embarrassing than the change itself. He could never quite suppress the original story because he had told it to too many people; so both versions made it to the history books.

Muhammad said that Gabriel had opened a new stage of the mission. He had commanded Muhammad to preach all Allah's messages in public, first to his closest family and then throughout Mecca, and to urge everyone to worship Allah alone.<sup>30</sup>

Muhammad was no longer a private prophet.

### **Summary**

- Muhammad reported a frightening experience in a cave. Khadija concluded that he had met an angel and that he must be a prophet.
- After some initial reluctance, Muhammad began to produce prophecies that urged people to submit to Allah, the only God.
- About a hundred people believed his message, known as *Islam*. They were mainly family members, close friends and poor people. Many of them were persuaded by a merchant named Abu Bakr, who became Muhammad's best friend and chief assistant.
- The converts, known as *Muslims*, met together to perform a prayer ritual and to listen to Muhammad reciting his prophecies.

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### **References and notes to Chapter 3: *The Angel in the Cave***

1 Q74:1-5 (Sahih).

2 Q96:1-5 (Sahih).

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3 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 105-106. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 10-11. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:224-225. Bukhari 1:1:3; 4:54:461; 4:55:605; 5:58:190; 6:60:478, 479, 480, 481. Muslim 1:301, 303, 304, 307. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:68-72, 74-76. Guillaume (1960) 29.

4 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 99, 106-107. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:225-226. Bukhari 1:1:3; 4:55:605; 6:60:478; 9:87:111. Muslim 1:301. Baladhuri (Murgotten) 2:271. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:68, 70, 72-73. Ibn Kathir 1:294-295, 297.

5 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 107, 111. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 10. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:69, 73. Guillaume (1960) 30.

6 Q68:1-6 (Sahih).

7 Q93:1-3 (Sahih).

8 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 111-112. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 11. Bukhari 1:1:3; 2:21:225; 6:60:476, 478; 8:73:233; 9:87:111. Muslim 1:304, 305. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:70, 76. Guillaume (1960) 30.

9 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 647. There is some evidence that the five daily prayers were not finalised until 621 (*see* chapter 6); but perhaps this finalisation was only a confirmation of Seraphiel's old message and not a new instruction.

10 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 112-113.

11 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 112-114. Malik 15:7. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:11. Bukhari 1:12:773, 776; 6:61:503. Muslim 1:304, 305. Abu Dawud 2:729, 958. Nasai 2:11:934; 2:12:1102. Tirmidhi 1:2:304; 5:46:3634. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:70, 74-77, 81-83. Guillaume (1960) 29-31.

12 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 111-115, 131-132. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 12. Ibn Hanbal (Khattab) 1:391 #776. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:75, 231-232; (Bewley) 3:3; 8:21, 25, 26, 157, 159, 193. Muslim 19:4375. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:334. Guillaume (1960) 32. *See also* Tabari (Landau-Tasseron) 39:65, 99.

13 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 115. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:131, 143-145. Bukhari 3:37:494. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:314, 318. Guillaume (1960) 32.

14 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 115-117, 143-146, 162, 234, 236, 655. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:38, 57, 75, 85, 87-89, 92, 94, 96, 104, 106, 114-117, 121, 125, 127, 164, 169-171, 177, 179, 182, 185-187, 188-191, 203, 299, 301; 8:180-181. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 4:462. Kister (1960-2007).

15 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 114-117, 142-143, 146-147, 156, 168, 179, 281, 527-528. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 12. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 715 #157. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:230; (Bewley) 3:39, 74-76, 94, 106, 114-115, 125, 128, 185, 208, 296, 299, 305, 307-308, 313, 315-316; 8:25, 26, 29, 114, 157, 180-181, 185-186, 193, 202. Tabari 6:80-87. There were several, especially from the slave class, who abandoned their faith in the persecution, and their names have been forgotten (Ibn Ishaq 143).

16 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 115, 116.

17 Q1:4; 4:31; 7:36-41, 50, 179; 19:86; 20:74; 25:65-69; 28:41-42; 35:6-7, 36-37; 36:63; 54:48; 56:93-94; 72:15; 73:12-13, 15, 17; 81:11-14, 19-29; 85:4-6, 10; 87:12-13; 89:23-26, 30; 90:19-20; 92:14-16; 96:9-16; 101:8-11; 102:6; 107:1. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 115, 199. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:39. Bukhari 1:2:18; 8:81:793; 9:93:560. Nasai 5:39:4166, 4167, 4183. Guillaume (1960) 48.

18 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 116, 146. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:230; (Bewley) 3:67, 190. Tabari 6:85.

19 Q2:177; 6:145; 16:115; 60:12; 73:2-6; 87:15; 89:17-18; 92:5, 18. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 199, 553. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 13. Bukhari 8:81:793; 9:93:560. Nasai 5:39:4166, 4167, 4183, 4186. "Fornication" meant sex outside of marriage or concubinage (Q24:4). A Muslim man

was still allowed to have multiple wives and concubines (Q23:6).

20 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 314.

21 Q2:125-127; 62:2. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 3-4, 35-39, 83, 99, 106-107, 255, 265, 268. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 10-12, 16. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:147, 221, 225-226. Baladhuri (Murgotten) 2:270-273. Bukhari 1:1:3; 1:4:189; 4:52:305; 4:55:605; 4:56:741; 6:60:478; 7:70:574 7:72:795; 9:87:111. Muslim 1:301. Tirmidhi 1:46:3643; 4:34:2288. Tirmidhi, *Shamail* 1:6; 2:15, 18, 20. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:46, 64, 66, 70, 72-73, 75. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:193, 279, 288, 296-297. Tisdall (1905) 8-9, 11, 15-16. Guillaume (1960) 21.

22 Q112:1-4 (Shakir).

23 Q1:1-7 (Shakir).

24 Q73:8-9 (Shakir).

25 Q58:22. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 121, 175, 428, 503. Waqidi (Faizer) 294. Tisdall (1905) 74.

26 Q17:79; 25:63-64. Bukhari 2:21:221, 222, 223, 224, 226, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 236, 239, 241, 242, 245, 247, 249, 252, 253, 255, 257, 258, 259, 261. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 121. Bukhari 1:3:68. *See* chapter 16 for some of Muhammad's extra rules.

27 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 117-118. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 12-13. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:230; (Bewley) 8:11. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:87, 89.

28 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 146, 314. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:231; (Bewley) 3:38-43; 8:24-26. Tabari (Humphreys) 15:254. Suyuti (Jarrett) 155. Guillaume (1960) 49, 52. Ahmed (2011) 109, 133. Later historians claim that Mr Redface had *two* sons who married two of Muhammad's daughters; but the whole narrative savours of cover-up, since Muhammad's alliance with the blasphemous Mr Redface was deemed embarrassing. Ibn Ishaq, the earliest historian, indicates that only one of Muhammad's daughters married Mr Redface's son. This was almost certainly Umm Kulthum, since a passing mention of their divorce (Ibn Hajar, *Isaba* 6 #9013) does not serve anyone's political agenda. It is possible, however, that an original, informal betrothal mentioned Ruqayya and that Umm Kulthum was later substituted when Ruqayya married Uthman.

29 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 142-143, 158. *See also* Waqidi (Faizer) 16-17.

30 Q26:214-216. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 117. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 47. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:220, 230. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:89.

## *Hellfire in Mecca*

**November 613 – August 616**

Late in 613 Muhammad told his cousin Ali to call the clan together, and forty Hashimites gathered in their house. After Ali had served them with roast mutton, wheat and milk, Muhammad made his speech.

“I’m bringing you the noblest message that any Arab ever brought, the best of this world and the next. Allah has commanded me to call you to Him. So who would like to be my partner in this business?”

Muhammad expected them to volunteer. After all, if the Hashim clan became Allah’s own deputies, they would rule the city. When the Hashimites proved less ambitious than Muhammad had hoped, he found himself staring at a sea of silent faces.

Finally Mr Redface broke the silence, exclaiming, “Your host has bewitched you!” The uncles laughed, and all the guests stood up to go home.<sup>1</sup>

Muhammad would have to look beyond the Hashim clan for assistants, so he decided to try for the whole Quraysh tribe. He climbed Safa Hill opposite the Kaaba, where public announcements were made, and shouted: “Disaster! Disaster!”

The Quraysh gathered around him, asking, “What’s the matter?”

When he had attracted a crowd, Muhammad asked, “Suppose I warned you that enemy cavalry were waiting in the valley, would you believe me?”

They agreed that they would, “for we have not known you to tell lies.”

“I’m warning you,” he said. “You face a terrible doom! Be ready

for it! I call you to Allah and I warn you of His retribution. Redeem yourselves, people of Quraysh, for I cannot save you from Allah's punishment. Uncle Abbas, I cannot save you! Aunt Safiya, I cannot save you! Fatima, my daughter, ask me for anything from my money, but I cannot save you from Allah's punishment. All of you, you cannot have Allah's favour or a place in Heaven unless you confess, "There is no god but Allah – ”

"May you perish!" interrupted his uncle Mr Redface. "Did you really summon us all together just to promise us pie in the sky when we die?" He blew on his hands and said to them, "I don't see you holding the rewards that Muhammad mentions. You're going to die!"

Muhammad produced a new prophecy on the spot.

*Both Redface and his hands will die!  
No wealth or gold escape can buy;  
in red-hot Fire he'll burn and fry.  
His timber-toting wife can't hope,  
for round her neck is noosed a rope.*

The Meccans were unimpressed by Muhammad's abuse of the disaster alarm; he found that he had lost their attention.

Mr Redface's wife was offended when she heard that Muhammad had prophesied about her. She marched up to the Kaaba waving a stone pestle and announced to Abu Bakr: "If I find your friend, I'll smash his mouth with this pestle. I can compose poems too!

*We reject depraved Muham-  
mad! His stupid words are sham!  
We detest and hate Islam!"*

She was too angry to notice that Muhammad was sitting right there behind Abu Bakr.<sup>2</sup>

Muhammad kept on preaching wherever he could find an audience. His friend Abu Bakr, his son-in-law Uthman, the slave Bilal and a few others also continued to share the message with

their friends. Yet the public preaching did not make a big difference to the number of converts; people were still only trickling into Islam at the same slow rate as in the first three years. Most Meccans were not at all interested.<sup>3</sup>

So Muhammad changed his preaching style. He insulted and cursed the gods in the Kaaba, jeered at their worshippers and warned the Quraysh that their ancestors had gone to Hell.

*I will cast him into Hell.  
And what will make you realize what Hell is?  
It leaves naught nor does it spare aught.  
It scorches the mortal.*<sup>4</sup>

The Meccans reacted with hostility. They agreed together to treat Muhammad as an enemy. One day he walked down the street, and everyone who passed him, down to the lowest slave, insulted him and called him a liar. He stumbled home in a state of shock and wrapped himself up in his cloak. Khadija consoled and exhorted him, assured him he was a prophet and belittled his opponents. When Muhammad had rallied his spirits, he produced a new prophecy:

*For when the trumpet is sounded,  
that, at that time, shall be a difficult day,  
for the unbelievers, anything but easy.*<sup>5</sup>

The experience was humiliating; but he acknowledged that his neighbours never treated him any worse than this.

Ten of the leaders visited Abu Talib, the head of Muhammad's family, and complained: "Your nephew has cursed the gods, insulted religion, mocked our customs and slandered our ancestors. If you don't restrain him, then we will."

Abu Talib spoke appeasing words, and the elders went away soothed.

Nothing changed. As Muhammad continued to insult their gods, his relationship with the Quraysh deteriorated. Old friends

distanced themselves from him and gossiped about him behind his back. The Quraysh elders set themselves against Islam. Allah sent down a string of messages about Muhammad's personal enemies. He warned Umayya Juma:

*Woe to every slanderer, defamer,  
who amasses wealth and considers it a provision;  
he thinks that his wealth will make him immortal.  
Nay! he shall most certainly be hurled into the crushing disaster.<sup>6</sup>*

Old Walid Makhzum said that Allah would not have spoken to Muhammad yet ignored a great chief like himself. Allah disagreed.<sup>7</sup>

*Will they distribute the mercy of your Lord?  
We distribute among them their livelihood in the life of this world,  
and We have exalted some of them above others in degrees,  
that some of them may take others in subjection;  
and the mercy of your Lord is better than what they amass.<sup>8</sup>*

Often Muhammad was followed around by Nadir Abdaldar, who competed for the crowd's attention. "Muhammad didn't hear those stories from Allah," he scoffed. "His message is nothing but a fairy-tale. Well, I can tell better fairy-tales: listen to me!"

Nadir told his own Persian stories about Rustum the Hero, Isbandiyar and the Kings of Persia. He would finish by asking, "How are Muhammad's stories any better than mine? He copies his stories from old fables, just as I do. I can give you a 'revelation' just like the ones from 'Allah' because 'revelations' are nothing but fairy-tales."

"You're the liar," Muhammad responded, "and if you don't believe Allah's words, you'll go to Hell. The Persians tell their stories in a foreign language, and Allah sends down the Quraan in plain Arabic."

Nobody was convinced, for plenty of Persians had learned to speak Arabic. Of course, some of their words could not be translated. For example, the Arabs did not believe in an afterlife, so they had



no word meaning “Heaven”. Instead of constructing a term out of Arabic words, Muhammad had been using the Persian word *Firdaus*.

Allah responded with a special message for Nadir.<sup>9</sup>

*Woe to every sinful liar,  
who hears the communications of Allah recited to him,  
then persists proudly as though he had not heard them;  
so announce to him a painful punishment.*<sup>10</sup>

One day some polytheists surprised a group of Muslims who were praying in a gully. Verbal insults were exchanged, and a fight broke out. A young Muslim, Saad Zuhra, hit one of the polytheists with a camel’s jawbone and split his head open.\*

After that the Muslims were constantly associated with violence. Abu Bakr’s father disparaged Muhammad, and Abu Bakr retaliated by hitting his father’s chest so hard that the old man was knocked to the ground. Muhammad told him not to do it again, but Abu Bakr protested, “If I had had a sword to hand, I would have killed him.”

Muhammad’s elderly Aunt Ruqayqa abused her son until he agreed to become a Muslim. The Muslims were known around town as “Muhammad’s louts”,† and quarrels and factions broke out all over the community.<sup>11</sup>

The violence brought the Quraysh elders for another visit to Abu Talib. “Give us justice against your nephew,” they said. “We don’t insult his religion, so why should he insult ours? If you don’t

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\* Saad Zuhra was the first man in history to shed blood for Islam. The texts do not state who struck the first blow in the fight; but if it had been a polytheist, the Muslim historians would have been certain to mention this.

† All the history books were written by Muslims, who were trying to make Muhammad and the Muslims look virtuous. So not many details about the “louts” have survived. However, the stories that we do still have are of course the ones that all the Muslims agreed were true.

restrain him, we will fight both of you.”

Abu Talib, who was lying sick at the time, was upset. He called Muhammad in and begged, “Don’t make my difficulties unbearable,” giving the impression that he was about to abandon his nephew to his enemies.

“Leave us and our gods alone,” said the elders, “and we’ll leave you and your gods alone.”

“I can give them something better than their gods,” Muhammad protested. “I can make them lords of all Arabia, and Persia will pay them taxes, if only they will testify, ‘There is no god but Allah.’ I would rather have this than to possess the sun and the moon.”

“Anything but that!” exclaimed the elders. “Is he combining all the gods into one god?”

After they had gone, Muhammad burst into tears, and Abu Talib admitted that he had no intention of abandoning him. Muhammad urged his uncle to avoid Hell by becoming a Muslim and prophesied that Allah would punish his opponents.<sup>12</sup>

Muhammad’s hint that he would conquer Arabia and Persia was more likely a daydream than a serious plan; but it only confirmed that he was leading a political movement.

The elder Abu Sufyan owned that he was bewildered and did not understand half of what Muhammad was saying.

His friend Mr Stupid replied that the situation was obvious: it was a ploy to take over Mecca. “The Hashim and Makhzum clans have been rivals for a long time. We’ve competed to be the best at feeding the poor, at helping our neighbours, at generosity. Now the Hashim clan has set up a prophet who brings messages from Heaven, and of course we can’t trump that. But he’s lying. We’ll never listen to him.”<sup>13</sup>

Muhammad continued to taunt the polytheists, calling them stupid and urging them to convert to Islam. Whenever he preached in

Mecca, they jeered and heckled. They called him a liar, suggested that he was possessed by the *jinn*, or speculated that he was a magician, a fortune-teller or a seer.

The three sacred months, when fighting was forbidden, began in August. Muhammad knew that people from all over Arabia would gather at the great trade-fairs; so he decided to go too so that he could tell foreign tribes about Allah.

Old Walid Makhzum, high chief of Mecca, warned the Quraysh: “Don’t go telling people that he’s a spellcaster, *jinn*-victim, visionary or sorcerer. Such obvious lies will only make his sweet words sound more credible. The way his message breaks up families is almost like sorcery, but we need to stick to the truth – he’s just a clever speaker.”

The Quraysh arranged themselves on the routes leading to the fairs and warned every traveller who passed about Muhammad. As a result, they gave him free publicity. The Arabs took the news of Muhammad home to their tribes, and he was discussed all over Arabia.<sup>14</sup>

Since Muhammad claimed to be a prophet in the Jewish style, the Quraysh consulted the Jews in Medina. Uqba Umayya and Nadir Abdalдар returned to Mecca with three questions from Jewish literature that a true prophet should be able to answer.

“What happened to the young men who disappeared long ago in the marvellous story? Who was the mighty traveller who reached the utmost East and utmost West? What is the spirit?”

Muhammad replied, “I’ll tell you the answers tomorrow!” then shut his front door.

He was stuck. Nobody at home knew the answers; it was not a situation where he could invent information; and the journey to Medina took a week. The Quraysh gossiped about the sudden disappearance of his prophecies until, predictably enough, it was on the fifteenth day that Muhammad emerged to announce the

angel Gabriel's message.

"The young men who sheltered in the cave were sealed up inside for 309 years. They seemed to be awake while they were sleeping, and their dog lay with his forepaws on the threshold. The mighty traveller was Two-Horns. He travelled the whole earth from the far east to the far west, and he was granted dominion over every land he trod. But only Allah knows what the spirit is." He added his usual warnings that people who rejected his message would go to Hell.<sup>15</sup>

Eventually the Quraysh elders approached Abu Talib for a third time. Part of the story is missing here, as we do not know their exact reason, but their complaint was very serious.

"We're offering you a swap," the elders said. "You can take Walid's son; he's a strong and handsome poet. We'll take Muhammad because we need to kill him. That will unite the Quraysh, and everyone will be happier in the end."

"That's not fair," said Abu Talib. "You want me to feed your son so that you can kill my son. Don't you know that if a camel has lost her foal, she has no feeling for any other?"

"We've tried to be fair with you, Abu Talib," the elders reasoned, "but you don't seem to want any compromise at all." They arose muttering among themselves that they wouldn't approach Abu Talib again. It would be better if they killed Muhammad secretly.

The next evening Muhammad disappeared from his house, and Abu Talib panicked. He alerted the clan: "Muhammad has been murdered! Bring your weapons quickly. We'll march into the Kaaba and we'll each select one elder to kill. Be sure that someone picks Mr Stupid."

Before they could set out, however, Muhammad's son Zayd arrived, saying he had seen his father alive after Abu Talib's call. The relatives did not believe him until he brought Muhammad in person. Nothing evil had happened: Muhammad had just been

visiting a friend.

The next morning Abu Talib marched the Hashim clan to the Kaaba and told them to display their swords. He warned the elders: “If you had killed Muhammad last night, none of you would be alive now.”

The elders jumped to their feet, and the quickest to run away was Mr Stupid.<sup>16</sup>

At this point the Quraysh elders were desperate. Abu Talib was willing to fight every other clan in Mecca for the sake of keeping his own clan together – and he was not even a Muslim. Yet people from every clan were converting to Islam, not just poor people but now the middle ranks as well. The Muslims might become strong enough to achieve Muhammad’s goal of taking over the Kaaba. Once they controlled religion, Muhammad would be King, and the Muslims would be his priests and governors. So it was not just a question of getting rid of Muhammad, for someone like Abu Bakr would soon stand up to take his place. They had to suppress the whole Islamic movement.

Arabia had no central government, and Mecca had no police or jails. The Meccan way of dealing with crime was to rely on the clan chiefs to deal with unruly juniors. The Quraysh elders decided that everyone would deal systematically with the Muslims in his own clan, punishing them until they gave up Islam.

For the next two years, the Quraysh oppressed the Muslims; but they did not oppress all of them equally.<sup>17</sup>

Nobody harmed Muhammad himself, for Abu Talib called upon the family to protect him, and his brother Mr Redface was the only one who refused to do so. Anyone who attacked Muhammad directly would invite the wrath of the whole Hashim clan, and nobody wanted to risk that.

It turned out that most of the Quraysh were like Abu Talib: although they disliked Islam, they were reluctant to harm their own

relatives. So their persecution was half-hearted. Muslims of high status had to endure jeers that they were blockheads. Merchants suffered when Mr Stupid organised a boycott of Muslim merchandise. Those of junior status within a family were locked up at home, which sometimes meant literally tying them up. It was sensible to remove from wider society young people who had proved themselves a danger to that society.

Often their restraints were ineffective. For example, Uthman's uncle became bored of guarding him long before Uthman had any thought of recanting Islam. The uncle had time to reflect that keeping Uthman in ropes and solitude would not restore his broken marriage to Mr Stupid's daughter; and he released his nephew without much fuss.

The affable Musaab Abdaldar was a very recent convert. His mother also tried to keep him imprisoned at home; but her prison was not very secure, for Musaab escaped.

Saad Zuhra's mother tried emotional blackmail. Her eldest son had already been kicked out of Mecca for killing someone,\* and when she saw that Saad was a ringleader of Islamic violence, she dreaded that he was going the same way. When her third son also converted to Islam, the desperate widow swore she would not eat or drink until Saad recanted his faith. Saad proved more stubborn than his mother. She lost the contest after only three days, when she fainted.

Nothing worse is recorded for anyone who had a protector.

The Quraysh were much crueller to people about whom they did not care. They beat their slaves until they could hardly stand up, imprisoned them in their houses, deprived them of food and drink or forced them to stand in the noonday sun.

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\* Her eldest son's crime had had nothing to do with Islam; it had happened before Muhammad met his angel. Saad's greatest regret was that he never had the opportunity to kill his older brother.

Even so, it is difficult to distinguish real persecution of the Muslims from ordinary abuse. Some slave-owners, like Umayya Juma and Umar, had always been cruel. Islam provided the latest excuse to continue the mistreatment; but it did not add up to a real change in the way the slaves were treated.

Mr Stupid and his nephew Umar were willing to beat other people's slaves as well as their own. Umar even told one girl: "I've only stopped beating you because my arm is tired!" Umayya Juma returned to his old trick of forcing the slave Bilal to lie on the hot sand with a rock on his chest. When he was tired of this, he roped him by the neck between two pillars of the Kaaba.

Bilal never once denied his faith; but the majority of the persecuted Muslims recanted. If they were asked, "Do you worship Al-Lat and Al-Uzza?" they could be bullied into saying yes. Often they no longer knew what they were saying. Even if they were asked, "Is this beetle your god?" they could be forced to say yes. Muhammad assured them that denials made under torture did not count as long as they were still Muslims in their hearts, and some of them recanted their recanting; but others permanently abandoned their faith.

The Muslims began to resist the persecution. Arqam, a rich young Muslim, owned a house conveniently situated on Safa Hill opposite the Kaaba. Late in 614 he opened it as a community centre where the Muslims could hold prayer meetings, recite the Quraan and hear new converts make their declaration of faith. Outside Arqam's house, they recited the Quraan only softly so that the Quraysh could not identify the Muslims in a crowd.<sup>18</sup>

Muhammad knew he had to move a body of Muslims away from the persecution before all of them gave up. He told them, "Be scattered over the earth. Go that way!" and he pointed toward Ethiopia.

In April 615 fifteen Muslims crept out of Mecca, marched to the Red Sea coast and sailed to Ethiopia. None of them was a poor

person at risk of severe abuse; but the Emperor accepted their appeal that they were refugees being persecuted for their faith and granted them a safe asylum in Ethiopia.

Yet they returned to Mecca just three months later. Perhaps they had only gone to investigate future possibilities. The Quraysh were angry to hear that the Emperor of Ethiopia had treated the Muslims kindly. They were probably afraid that Muhammad was plotting with the Emperor to invade Arabia;\* it was only seventy years since a previous Emperor of Ethiopia really had tried this. The fifteen Muslims were regarded as traitors and shunned worse than before.

Among them was the affable Musaab Abdaladar. His mother now refused to contribute a penny to his support. Why should she allow him back home when he was the one who had run away? Besides, he was at least 31 years old, and it was time he learned to work for a living. He became faint, thin and ragged; he wasted until he was too feeble to walk and had to be carried. It looked dramatic; but it does not explain why he chose starvation over work. Unemployment was not inevitable, even in a climate of persecution, for Muhammad was careful to match up each poor Muslim to a wealthy household. Since Musaab later married one of Muhammad's cousins, he must have been under the protection of her rich brothers; and in due course he recovered his health.<sup>19</sup>

Muhammad's friend Abu Bakr stepped in and stopped most of the slave-abuse single-handedly. He rescued Bilal by swapping him for a larger slave. He bought up another slave whom his stepson was abusing; two of Khadija's nieces who had been sold into slavery; and three more slave-women too. He set all seven of these slaves free as soon as he had them in his possession.

Khadija's brother Naowfal, perhaps angry that Abu Bakr had ransomed his nieces, tied Abu Bakr to his cousin Talha and left

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\* There is no evidence that Muhammad was really plotting this. It is unlikely that he wanted to make Islam subject to a foreign Christian King.



them helplessly roped together. The Muslims called him a “satan” for doing this, indicating that – mild as it was – it was one of the worst things that ever happened to a high-class Muslim.

Abu Bakr could have afforded to ransom many more slaves if he had wanted to. Instead, he wasted his money on a foolish bet. That autumn the Persian army defeated the Romans and nearly destroyed the Roman Empire. Muhammad predicted that the Romans would make a come-back.

*The Romans are vanquished in a near land,  
and they, after being vanquished, shall overcome,  
within a few\* years.<sup>20</sup>*

Abu Bakr rashly bet a hundred camels that the Roman victory would occur in just six years. For the same price, about a quarter of his savings, he could have bought twenty slaves. If he had done so, it would have stopped the persecution and it would have created a body of grateful people who would always be loyal to him. Since Abu Bakr did not buy any more slaves and nor, as far as we know, did any of the other wealthy Muslims, this suggests that they did not know of any others who were suffering serious abuse.

The one group of Muslims who really suffered under the persecution were the free but poor people who had no formal protector. They were even more vulnerable than the slaves, for nobody had invested anything in helping them.

A poor swordsmith named Khabbab was very loud about his conversion to Islam. He complained that a customer had refused to pay him until they met in Heaven. Allah warned the wealthy customer:

*Has he gained knowledge of the unseen,  
or made a covenant with the Beneficent Allah?*

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\* The word translated “few” is very specific. It means “at least three but fewer than ten”.

*By no means! We write down what he says,  
and We will lengthen to him the length of the chastisement ...*<sup>21</sup>

Khabbab's brother was so embarrassed that he seized him and pressed him down on a fire, leaving his back permanently seared white. They were foreign vassals who depended utterly on their Quraysh patrons, and the dysfunctional family could not think of any other way to correct Khabbab's treachery.

Then there was Abu Dharr, a bandit who stood on the steps of the Kaaba, yelling that Muhammad was a prophet and the gods did not deserve to be worshipped. When the Quraysh beat him up, nobody moved to help him: he was just a bandit and he did not even live in Mecca.

Ibn Masud, a poor shepherd, volunteered to teach the Quraan to the Quraysh. He stood up at the Kaaba sanctuary and interrupted the elders' confabulations by shouting out: "*In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, the Beneficent who taught the Quraan ...!*"

When the elders realised that he was proclaiming Muhammad's message, they slapped his face. Ibn Masud continued reciting, and the elders kept hitting him. He returned to Muhammad covered with bruises, offering to recite again tomorrow; but the Muslims hastily assured him that he had done enough by forcing the elders to listen once.

Khabbab led a complaint-delegation Muhammad. Would he please pray to Allah that the torture would stop?

Muhammad, sitting comfortably on his cloak in the shade of the Kaaba, had no confidence that Allah would grant that kind of petition. Instead he consoled the persecuted Muslims with horror-stories about long-ago monotheists who had endured even worse tortures than themselves. "They stood one man in a ditch and sawed him from the head downward until he was cut into halves; yet he didn't recant his faith. They raked iron combs down another man's body until his flesh was stripped from his bones and his

nerves were exposed; yet he didn't recant his faith. One day Islam will prevail everywhere; but you are impatient."<sup>22</sup>

The worst thing that ever happened to Muhammad himself was when he interrupted the elders in counsel to declare: "Listen! I swear I bring you slaughter!"

The elders were shocked into silence. They began to speak to him kindly, saying, "Go home, Muhammad, for by the gods, you are no fool."

The next day, when Muhammad entered the Kaaba again, Uqba Umayya grabbed his robe as if to rough-handle him. Abu Bakr thrust himself between them, and nobody touched Muhammad. Uqba and Abu Bakr scuffled,\* and Abu Bakr came home with part of his beard torn out; but still nobody made any worse attack on Muhammad.<sup>23</sup>

These oppressions were too petty to weaken anyone's faith; they only caused the Muslims to resent their oppressors and to devote themselves to Islam more determinedly than ever. Muhammad continued to preach about Hell.

*Most surely there is an evil resort for the inordinate ones;*

*Hell; they shall enter it, so evil is the resting-place.*

*This [shall be so]; so let them taste it, boiling and intensely cold [drink].*

*And other [punishment] of the same kind – of various sorts ...*

*They shall say: "Our Lord! whoever prepared it first for us,  
add Thou to him a double chastisement in the fire."*<sup>24</sup>

The Quraysh elders challenged him to perform a miracle. "Flatten the mountains into farmland and conjure up fountains to water them! Raise up a golden castle for yourself with palm-gardens and chests of silver! Resurrect our ancestors so that we can ask them about you!"

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\* Since the Muslim-friendly source does not state that Uqba struck the first blow in this fight, the culprit was more likely Abu Bakr, whose quick fists are very well documented.

“O Allah, if he’s telling the truth,” invoked Mr Stupid, “shower upon us an avalanche of rocks from the sky or call the sky itself to fall down and crush us! Since we deserve punishment, inflict us with a grievous torment!”

Muhammad said that Allah had not sent him to perform miracles. “The only miracle that I shall bring you is the Quraan, for neither men nor *jinn* can compose anything like it.”

The elders warned him that if he could not bring any proof of his special status with Allah, they would not change their policy against him until one side had destroyed the other.<sup>25</sup>

Muhammad’s old friend Ammar had been one of the first people to convert in Arqam’s house. He suffered some of the worst persecution. He was very public about being a Muslim, and the family were freed slaves. Since the death of their old master, they had had no protector in Mecca.

The Makhzum clan, probably led by Mr Stupid, dragged Ammar through the hot sand, leaving scars on his back for the rest of his life. They burned him and his mother with fire, forced them to wear iron mail-coats in the heat of the day and half-drowned them in vats of water. Ammar and both his parents were exposed to the desert sun without water for hours at a time. Muhammad used to pass them, calling, “Be brave, family of Yasir! You will all go to Heaven!” The Muslims were unable to negotiate a rescue: they did not have the numerical strength to oppose the Makhzumites, and they could not buy people who were not slaves.

Ammar came to Muhammad weeping because, tortured to the point where he did not know what he was saying, he had recanted his faith.

Ammar’s mother Sumayya also proclaimed her new faith very publicly. Although she was about seventy years old, she remained steadfast under torture. When Mr Stupid realised that this frail old woman would rather die of thirst or sunstroke than deny her faith,

he stabbed her through the stomach with his spear.

Sumayya was Islam's first martyr and she was the only Muslim who died in the Meccan persecution. Nobody ever brought Mr Stupid to justice for this murder, for that was the meaning of being an unprotected person in Arabia.<sup>26</sup>

Muhammad decided to implement his earlier idea of sending a body of Muslims away to a safer place. Although it would mean removing them from the sight of the Kaaba and the sound of his prophecies, that would be better than risking that his entire band of followers would abandon their faith. He told them that it was time to emigrate to Ethiopia in earnest. Over a hundred of them obeyed his call, a larger group than those who stayed behind in Mecca. Muhammad sent the Emperor of Ethiopia a gift of musk, so Khadija's business was still functioning even at that late date.

The Quraysh were alarmed. They sent Umar and two others with a gift of leather and petitioned the Emperor to return the refugees to Arabia. The Muslims had deliberately given the Emperor the impression that they were a Christian group, so Umar stressed that the trouble-makers followed an "invented religion" where Jesus was not God. The Emperor, who had a reputation for justice, did not listen. He had already promised the asylum seekers his protection, and he told Umar that he could not betray their trust. He rejected the leather gifts, and the Quraysh returned home crestfallen. This Muslim colony remained in Ethiopia for several years, worshipping Allah with complete freedom of religion.<sup>27</sup>

At about this time, Muhammad's Uncle Hamza returned from hunting to hear that Mr Stupid had insulted Muhammad. Hamza raced to the Kaaba, where he found Mr Stupid sitting among the elders. He smashed his bow down on his head, which fractured his skull, and shouted: "Will you insult him now that I follow his religion and agree with him? Hit me back if you can!"

It was the first anyone had heard of Hamza's being a Muslim. While the crowd was silent with astonishment, Abu Bakr stood up

in the Kaaba and announced that there was no god but Allah and the others were worthless.

At this blasphemy, the same polytheists who had been too intimidated to stand up to Hamza rushed to silence Abu Bakr. Utba Abdshams beat his face with a sandal. Members of Abu Bakr's clan started hitting back, and soon there was a fist-fight all over the sacred Temple. The polytheists gave up when they saw that Abu Bakr had been knocked out. He was carried away unconscious, amid rumours that he was dying.

He was only stunned and he felt better by evening. He begged his mother to take him to Muhammad, who was lying low in Arqam's house. The old lady agreed to meet the Prophet, and she became a Muslim that night.

Uncle Hamza went home to a sleepless bed, tormented by doubts in case he had blasphemed the gods. Next morning Muhammad had to frighten him with Hellfire and promise him Heaven before he was reassured. After that Hamza's faith never wavered.

His conversion made the Quraysh more cautious about attacking the Muslims: people were afraid of Hamza. Mr Stupid would not even allow his clan to demand justice for the assault at the Kaaba.<sup>28</sup>

So the Quraysh were forced to recognise that the persecution was not working. They had killed an elderly pauper who was no threat to anyone but they had not touched Muhammad himself. Now most of the Muslims were out of their reach in Ethiopia, alarmingly close to a powerful Emperor, while Muhammad was better protected than ever. People of high rank were converting to Islam, bolstering the movement with their wealth and social influence.

The elders made a final effort to negotiate with Muhammad. Utba Abdshams led Walid Makhzum, Abu Sufyan, Umayya Juma, Mr Stupid, Nadir Abdaldar and some others to sit him down at the Kaaba. They offered him money, women, social status, political power or medicine to dispossess him of the *jinn* – if only he would

stop blaspheming their gods. Muhammad refused their offer and repeated his warnings of Hellfire.<sup>29</sup>

Their negotiation had failed. Islam was still growing. By the summer of 616 it was inevitable that something would change.

The person who changed it was Mr Stupid's nephew Umar.

### **Summary**

- Muhammad announced in public that he was a prophet, but the Meccan polytheists laughed at him.
- Muhammad blasphemed the Arabian gods; the Meccans mocked his preaching; and the Muslims reacted with violence. Soon there were fights all over the streets, and families broke up over the conflict.
- The Quraysh became afraid that Muhammad's gang would take over the city. They began a campaign of harassing the lower-class Muslims. Some were tortured and one was killed.
- Muhammad was safe because he was under the protection of his uncle Abu Talib.

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### **References and Notes to Chapter 4: *Hellfire in Mecca***

1 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 58, 61, 117-118, 142. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:17, 89-92. Lammens (1913-1936). Guillaume (1960) 32-33. Hawting (2000) 22.

2 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 118-119, 161-162. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:75, 231-232. Bukhari 4:51:16; 6:60:293, 325, 495, 496, 497. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:89, 92. Muhammad's poem is now chapter 111 of the Quraan. It is not known why he referred to Mr Redface's wife as "timber-toting".

3 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 117-118. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:230-231; (Bewley) 3:178. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:87, 93, 98.

4 Q74:26-29 (Shakir).

5 Q74:8-10 (Shakir).

6 Q104:1-4 (Shakir).

7 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 111, 118-119, 162, 164, 168, 181. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 718 #177. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:231-232. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:93-94, 98. *See also* Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 2:90.

8 Q43:32 (Shakir).

9 Q16:101-105. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 119, 130, 136, 162-163. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 718

#179. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:233. Tisdall (1905) 68, 70, 73-74.

10 Q45:7-8 (Shakir).

11 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 118, 131, 169, 654. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:38. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:88-89. Wahidi (Guezzou) on Q22:58.

12 Q38:5-8. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 118-119. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:233-234. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:94-97. *See also* Guillaume (1960) 44-45.

13 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 142-143. *See also* Waqidi (Faizer) 16-17.

14 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 121-122. Bukhari 3:34:266. Abu Dawud 10:1730. Guillaume (1960) 33.

15 Q18:9-26. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 136-141.

16 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 168. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:233-235. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:97. Guillaume (1960) 33.

17 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 116-118, 133, 142-143, 146. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 715 #160, #161. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:63, 128, 178, 296, 299, 302, 305, 307, 316-317; 8:188. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:97-99. Margoliouth (1905) 3, 16, 191.

18 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 116, 118, 120, 122, 141, 143-145, 147, 191, 303. Waqidi (Faizer) 121. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:3, 39-40, 88, 106, 115, 177-178, 185-186, 190-191, 303, 305; 8:181. Bukhari 5:58:202; 6:60:246; 9:85:75. Muslim 31:5933. Ibn Maja 1:1:150. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:93, 97-98; (Smith) 14:120; (Landau-Tasserion) 39:47 & f213. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:323. Suyuti (Jarrett) 155.

19 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 22-28, 146-147, 199, 389. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:235-236, 239; (Bewley) 3:87-89. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:98-99. Guillaume (1960) 40, 42-43. Henze (2000) 40-41.

20 Q30:2-4.

21 Q19:78-79 (Shakir).

22 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 127-128, 141-145, 162. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 715 #158, 743 #422. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:131, 126, 176, 178, 190; 8:180-181. Bukhari 4:56:719, 725, 809; 5:58:191, 201; 5:59:419; 9:85:76. Muslim 31:6046, 6126. Tirmidhi 5:44:3193, 3194. Tabari (Bosworth) 5:326. Butler (1902, 1978) 123-127. Kister (1960-2007). In contradiction, Ibn Saad (Bewley 3:177-178) says that Abu Bakr paid cash for Bilal. Khadija's nieces were also related to Abu Bakr's family.

23 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 130-131. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 101-103. Ibn Kathir 1:343.

24 Q38:55-58, 61 (Shakir).

25 Q17:88, 90. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 134-135. Muslim 39:6717.

26 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 117, 145. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:178, 188-191; 8:185-186. Ibn Maja 1:1:150.

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28 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 131-132. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:3. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:104. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:319-320, 324. Guillaume (1960) 37-38.

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## *The Satanic Verses*

**August 616 – September 619**

Late one evening Muhammad prostrated at the Kaaba and recited the Quraan to himself. Only one other man was skulking in the shadows, and Muhammad took no notice of him until he set off for home. As he passed Uncle Abbas's house, he became aware of being followed. As the other man caught up, Muhammad recognised Mr Stupid's nephew Umar.

Expecting trouble, he demanded, "What are you doing here so late?"

To his astonishment, Umar replied: "I want to become a Muslim."

Nobody knows what they said to each other or how long it took Umar to convince Muhammad that he was sincere. Umar, the great persecutor of the Muslims, had a personal problem. His clan members kept converting to Islam: his older brother, his two adopted brothers, his sister and her husband, his daughter's fiancé, at least four of his vassals, his wife's four siblings and two nephews, a sister-in-law and her rich father. Umar had known since the emigration to Ethiopia that he would lose control of his clan if he did not become a Muslim.

Umar could offer significant benefits to Muhammad. He was very clever. He had a lot of money and he was willing to spend it all for Islam and become penniless rather than lose control over his family. His relatives in the hostile Makhzum clan might now be neutralised. He was large, strong and stubborn, and people were afraid of him. In fact, Umar could be Muhammad's ticket to victory.

Although Islam was still a minority – about 300 people in a city of 8,000 – it had reached tipping-point. The Muslims included someone from every major clan, and they were a well-coordinated

### Leaders of the Opposition to Muhammad

1. **Walid**, head of the wealthy and energetic **Makhzum** clan, was high chief of Mecca. The other Quraysh followed his advice on how to deal with Muhammad.
2. **Mr Stupid** was Walid's nephew. The rich aristocrat Uthman had divorced his daughter Asma in order to marry Muhammad's daughter Ruqayya. Perhaps because of this, Mr Stupid was the most hostile of all and very determined to crush Islam.
3. **Umar Adiy**, a nephew of Mr Stupid, was a very large, strong and clever man who often became violent.
4. **Abu Sufyan**, chief of the powerful **Umayya** clan, was one of highest-status men in Mecca. Although he opposed Islam, he remained polite to Muhammad's face and never said anything unkind about him. Muhammad assumed that he was secretly plotting evil, but perhaps Abu Sufyan was just trying to settle the problem calmly and fairly.
5. **Utba Abdshams**, the father of Abu Sufyan's wife Hind, was another powerful leader. He too was politely disapproving.
6. **Uqba Umayya**, who was Uthman's stepfather, whose wife was Muhammad's cousin and whose daughter was another wife of Abu Sufyan, expressed open hostility and was a nuisance-neighbour.
7. **Mr Redface**, Muhammad's uncle, was equally hostile and also a bad neighbour. His wife was Abu Sufyan's sister.
8. **Umayya Juma**, a stately and heavy-set old man, was an influential citizen and a vocal opponent.
9. **Nadir Abdaldar**, a storyteller, was a leading heckler.<sup>1</sup>

group. If anyone as important as Umar converted, Muhammad really might be able to take over the Kaaba. If Umar could also persuade his uncle Mr Stupid to join them, Islam was certain to be the winning team.

Finally Muhammad said, "Allah has guided you!" and prayed that Umar might be steadfast. Then they set the stage to inform everyone in Mecca about Umar's change of loyalties.<sup>2</sup>

On Wednesday evening the Muslims met in Arqam's house. Muhammad stood up to lead prayers and prayed a daring petition out loud. "O Allah, send either Umar or Mr Stupid – which ever one Thou lovest more – to strengthen Islam!"

Meanwhile, Umar knocked on Mr Stupid's door. This was the only part of the plan that went wrong. Mr Stupid was not interested in Islam, and he slammed his door in Umar's face.

Umar was undeterred; he could manage without his uncle.

On Thursday morning Umar left his house, sword in hand. He told his family that he was going to kill Muhammad.

On the way he met a poor Muslim from his own clan who, probably acting on Muhammad's orders, asked him: "Why are you bothering with Muhammad? Why don't you deal with problems closer to home? Your sister Umm Jamil is a Muslim!"

So Umar detoured to Umm Jamil's house. From outside he could hear Khabbab the swordsmith reading something out loud. He barged indoors, demanding, "What's that rubbish I'm hearing?"

"Nothing!" Umm Jamil and her husband replied. "We were just chatting!" There was no manuscript in sight; and Khabbab had also disappeared.

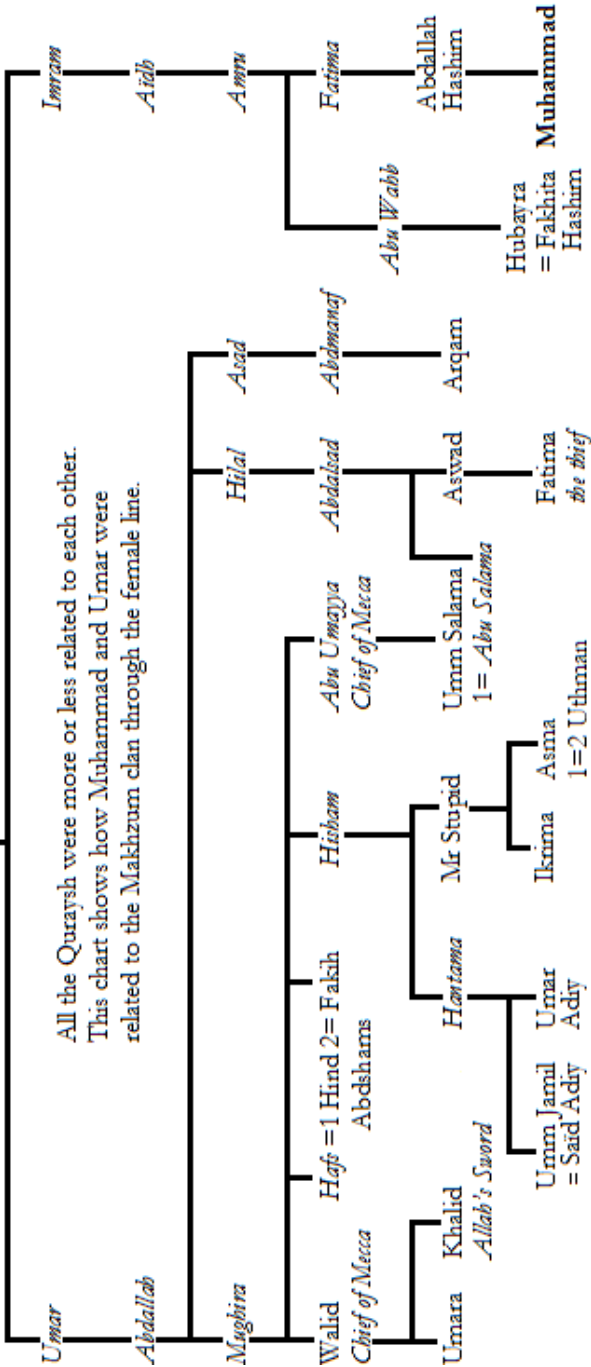
"I did hear something," Umar said, "and I'm told that you are following the Heretic's teaching." In fact they had been Muslims for about two years, and Umar must have known this.

Umm Jamil's husband was their cousin Saïd, the son of Abu Saïd

*The Makhzum Clan*

*Makhzum (clan founder)*

All the Quraysh were more or less related to each other.  
This chart shows how Muhammad and Umar were related to the Makhzum clan through the female line.



the Monotheist. "Umar," he said, "what would you think if your religion turned out to be untrue?"

Umar shoved Saïd to the floor. Umm Jamil jumped to her feet to defend her husband (forgetting that she had been sitting on the writing) and Umar slapped her. Then he spied the manuscript, which was a shoulder-blade, and he grabbed it and whacked her head. "Take that," he shouted, "for refusing to eat the same food as I do!" It was, after all, his last chance to beat her.

Terrified, Umm Jamil and Saïd declared: "Yes, we are Muslims. We believe in Allah and His Messenger. Do whatever you like to us!"

The bone had cut Umm Jamil's head open in two places. At the sight of her blood, Umar stopped the assault. He turned around and changed his tone to softness. "Give me that page that you were reading," he said. "I want to see Muhammad's message. Don't be afraid. I swear by Al-Uzza that I'll return it."

Umm Jamil made Umar wash his hands before she showed him the shoulder-blade. Very little of the Quraan had found its way to writing because so few of the Muslims could read; most of them just memorised it by rote. Muhammad, who knew that Umar could read, had planted one of their few written records into the centre of the drama.

*Ta-Ha!*

*We have not revealed the Quraan to you that you may be unsuccessful.*

*Nay, it is a reminder to him who fears:*

*a revelation from Him Who created the earth and the high Heavens.*

*The Beneficent Allah is firm in power ...<sup>3</sup>*

Apparently struck by the beauty of the divine words, Umar declared, "Is this what the Quraysh are running away from? Lead me to Muhammad so that I may accept Islam!"

So he went to Arqam's house, where 51 Muslims were gathered. Some of them were frightened by his approach, but Uncle Hamza said, "Let him in. If he comes in peace, we'll treat him well, and if

he means us evil, we'll kill him with his own sword."

Muhammad stood in front of their audience to meet Umar and grabbed his cloak. Umar laughed as he announced: "O Allah's Messenger, I have come to you to believe in Allah and His Messenger and His divine message." Muhammad shouted thanks to Allah.

"Let's proclaim Allah's religion!" Umar said. "If people become aggressive, we'll make an end of them!" Umar marched out down the hill to the steps of the Kaaba, where he shouted: "I have become a Muslim! I testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His messenger!"

The Quraysh rose to attack him, and Umar beat them off for hours. He seized Utba Abdshams and poked his fingers into his eyes until he screamed. As the crowd swelled around the action Umar kept grabbing at elders and wrestling them down. The fight lasted until noon.<sup>4</sup>

From that day onward, Umar was the best friend of Muhammad and Abu Bakr. Abu Bakr recognised what a stunning asset to their cause he was and declared that, "No man on the face of the earth is dearer to me than Umar." The three of them were always together. For the rest of his life, Muhammad was always saying, "Abu Bakr, Umar and I were somewhere," or "did something," or "went somewhere." People said later that Abu Bakr and Umar were "the father and mother of Islam."<sup>5</sup>

The Muslims preached Islam openly. They sat in a circle around the Kaaba and walked around it fearlessly. They entered the temple and denounced the gods in their very presence. Umar preached Islam loudly, and so did Uncle Hamza. Abu Bakr was more discreet but he was also more emotional, and women, boys and slaves fell under his spell.

Whenever Umar saw a Muslim being beaten or doing the beating, he joined the fight, and he "did not stop beating and being beaten"

as long as Islam was weak. The Muslims took eager revenge for some of their past sufferings. Nobody dared attack them after Umar became their protector.<sup>6</sup>

These dramas only lasted a few days. Mecca was on the point of civil war, and the Quraysh were furious. So the elders met and devised a plan.

They decreed that the Hashim clan must deliver Muhammad to be killed. Until they did, the whole clan was boycotted. Nobody could buy from them. Nobody could sell to them. Nobody could marry them. Nobody could visit their homes. Nobody could speak to them in public. They had no protection against assault or robbery if they moved out of one designated safety area. Other local tribes agreed to join the Quraysh in this boycott. They put their resolution in writing: the storyteller Nadir Abdaldar was one of the clerks. The document was posted in the middle of the Kaaba as a reminder to the whole city.

Uncle Abu Talib retaliated by marching the Hashim clan to the Kaaba, where he invoked the gods to punish the Quraysh. They proceeded to the council of the elders and interrupted their meeting. Abu Talib warned them: "The gods will punish you for decreeing bloodshed within your own tribe."

The elders replied: "There cannot be peace between us and you unless you hand over that foolish young man to us to be killed."

So the Hashimites understood that the Quraysh had united against them and they would only be safe if they retreated to the safety area. This place was a mountain-pass on the eastern edge of Mecca. Although it was within hailing distance of the buildings, it was separate from the city, for its only entrance was so narrow that it could be constantly guarded.

On 22 September 616 Abu Talib gathered his clan at this entrance and led them inside. Once the guard was posted, the Hashim clan was safe but trapped between the cliffs. Mr Redface, who had

disowned his clan and joined the Quraysh, exulted, “Al-Lat and Al-Uzza have won!”<sup>7</sup>

While the Hashimites camped in the ravine, it was easy for the Quraysh to enforce their blockade and prevent all supplies from reaching them. If merchants from another tribe arrived in Mecca, Walid Makhzum sent the town-criers to call people out to the bazaar. The Quraysh raced to buy up all the supplies, even if they had to buy on credit. Prices rose – assuming anything at all was left by the time a Muslim dared to creep out from the ravine.

The Hashimites had no legal means of buying food, and nobody was allowed to transport food to their entrance. For supplies they had to depend on smuggler-friends who were willing and able to bypass the Meccans. For example, one merchant used to load his camel with food and lead it to the gorge by night. When he reached the entry, he used to take off its halter and whack its side so that it would squeeze through the gateway with its delivery. As time went on, and the Hashimites became ragged, the same merchant also sent deliveries of clothes for them.

Since the Hashimites had no way of earning money to pay for this food, they had to expend their savings. Khadija invested all her wealth in supporting the Muslim community. When her nephew was delivering some flour that she had bought, Mr Stupid blocked his path and threatened to denounce him to the elders for breaching the boycott. Another of Khadija’s cousins intervened in their dispute and warned that Khadija, not being a Hashimite, had the right to her delivery. When Mr Stupid still refused to budge, the cousin beat him with a camel’s jawbone.

Uncle Abu Talib still worried about Muhammad’s safety. He made sure that his nephew never slept in his own bed. Every night a different relative exchanged places with him so that, should an assassin breach the portal in the dark, the wrong man would be murdered. Abu Talib urged his clan not to be discouraged.

*We’ll never heed ill-speaking man,*



*nor sever bonds of love and clan ...  
Whate'er befall, we'll not complain  
but keep our heads and bear the strain,  
nor ever let our valour wane ...*

Muhammad reminded his family that prophets must expect hardship. “Khadija’s cousin Waraqa told me that he wished he were young and could be still alive when my people turned me out. I asked, ‘Will they drive me out?’ He replied, ‘Yes. Everyone who ever brought this kind of message has made enemies. People will call you a liar, harass you, drive you out and fight you. If I live long enough to see that, I will come to Allah’s assistance as much as I can.’ Then he died a few days later.”<sup>8</sup>

The elders decided that it was no part of Quraysh responsibility to pay the expenses of Muhammad’s daughters. They approached his sons-in-law and pressured them to issue divorces, promising to give them any women they liked in exchange. Their bribes had no effect on Lakit, who insisted that Zaynab was the only woman he wanted; but Mr Redface chimed in that he would never speak to his son Utba again unless he divorced Umm Kulthum. When Utba replied that he would not exchange her for anyone less than a member of Umayya clan, the elders negotiated for an Ummayyad bride. Utba pronounced the divorce.

Khadija’s son Hind apparently felt that Muhammad’s attitude to Mr Redface had directly caused the divorce, for he asked: “Why did you separate Umm Kulthum from Utba?”

Muhammad was defiant. “Allah has prevented her marriage to a man who is going to Hell.” He would have liked Lakit to divorce Zaynab too; but it was to be another eight years before he managed to separate them. Meanwhile, his son Zayd retaliated by divorcing Mr Redface’s daughter Durra.<sup>9</sup>

Muhammad continued to reveal Allah’s messages to his clan. There was not much to do all day in the ravine, so he had time to produce longer poems. He urged the Muslims not to give up.

*Successful indeed are the believers,  
 who are humble in their prayers,  
 and who keep aloof from what is vain,  
 and who are givers of poor-rate,  
 and who guard their private parts ...  
 and those who are keepers of their trusts and their covenant,  
 and those who keep a guard on their prayers;  
 these are they who are the heirs,  
 who shall inherit the Paradise; they shall abide therein.<sup>10</sup>*

He reminded his faithful followers of the glories of Heaven. "Allah will be there, and He will never be angry with you again. However, you might not see Him directly as His dazzling majesty will hide His face.

"Allah's herald will say: 'Welcome to Heaven, which is your reward for your good works!' You will live forever and never die. You will never become sick but will always be thirty years old. Your face will be as bright as the moon or the stars and you will be sixty cubits\* tall. You will never be poor and your clothes will never wear out. You will eat and drink, but you will never urinate, defecate, salivate or nose-drip."

"So what will happen to our food?"

"You will belch and sweat it out, and your sweat will smell like musk. You will have combs and dishes of gold and silver, and you will burn aloes in your braziers. You will have no quarrels or enmity but will praise and glorify Allah in unity as easily as you breathe."

*How happy are the companions of the right hand,  
 amid thornless lote-trees and banana-trees, one above another,  
 and extended shade and water flowing constantly,  
 and abundant fruit, neither intercepted nor forbidden,  
 and exalted thrones.<sup>11</sup>*

"The lote-tree is so large," Muhammad said, "that you can ride a

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\* This was just under 30 metres or just over 30 yards.

hundred years in its shade without passing it. In it are golden butterflies and golden dates. There are rivers flowing with water, honey, milk or wine.”

“Nobody will be single in Heaven,” he promised. “You will keep any wives that you had on earth, and every man will also have two heavenly wives.” These new wives would be beautiful virgins with wide, dark eyes and rounded breasts, the marrow of their bones visible through their shimmering pale flesh. In fact they would look rather like Abu Bakr’s wife.

*... those who restrained their eyes;  
before them neither man nor jinni shall have touched them ...  
as though they were rubies and pearls ...  
In them are goodly things, beautiful ones.  
Pure ones confined to the pavilions.  
Man has not touched them before them nor jinni.  
Reclining on green cushions and beautiful carpets.<sup>12</sup>*

These perfect maidens would welcome Muslim men to eternal sex-parties. “You will have the sexual prowess of a hundred men, and you will visit and enjoy your wives.” However, there was no need to worry about jealousy between the women. “You will live in a pavilion made of a hollow pearl sixty miles wide and high. Each wife will have her own corner. She won’t see the women in the other corners and she won’t see you moving around from one to another.”

Muhammad already knew the names of the two heavenly brides whom Allah had allocated to him. One was Asiya, Queen of Egypt, who had long ago rescued the baby Prophet Moses. The other was the Virgin Mary, mother of the Prophet Jesus.

By this time Khadija was in her late forties and not as beautiful as she had been. For the rest of her life, Muhammad spoke often of the heavenly brides. Khadija calmly wished him joy with his new wives and never indicated that this kind of talk bothered her. Muhammad always confided his discouragements in Khadija, and

she was quick to console him.

“Although there have been many perfect men,” he said, “there have only ever been only four perfect women. They are Queen Asiya, the Virgin Mary, my wife Khadija and our daughter Fatima.”<sup>13</sup>

He spoke even more about Hell than Heaven. The only route from earth to Heaven was a hair-fine, sword-sharp, slippery bridge that stretched over the pit of Hell. Angels would guide a pious Muslim across, but the unbelievers would fall into the lake of fire below.

*Surely you and what you worship besides Allah  
are the firewood of Hell; to it you shall come.  
Had these been gods, they would not have come to it  
and all shall abide therein.*

*For them therein shall be groaning and therein they shall not hear.*<sup>14</sup>

Even Muslims would face perils crossing the Bridge of Death, for huge hooked horns would rise up from the flames to snatch at the travellers. “The most pious of you will pass over like lightning and escape them; but others will be scratched and torn by the thorns; and sinners will be tossed into Hell.” Most Muslims could expect to spend a few centuries burning off their sins in Hell, sins such as failing to share surplus water in the desert, wearing robes longer than their ankles and washing before prayers or prostrating at prayer incorrectly.

Nevertheless, Muhammad promised: “Later the angels will fish some of you out of Hell because of your good works. The ones rescued from Hell will be black like ebony, but at the gate of Heaven they will bathe in the River of Life and emerge white like pearls. On the other side of the bridge you will take revenge on one another for the wrongs you have done to each other on earth. When you have been purified, you will enter Heaven.”

There was a special warning for those wicked women who piled up their hair as high as camel-humps to seduce men. “Although

you're wearing clothes, you might as well be naked. You will never smell Heaven although its perfume can be smelled from forty years away." They were just as bad as people who flogged their subordinates with whips like ox-tails. Both types were certain remain in Hell forever, where they would suffer Allah's wrath from dawn to twilight.

*And as for him whose good deeds are light,  
these are they who shall have lost their souls, abiding in Hell.  
The fire shall scorch their faces,  
and they therein shall be in severe affliction.*<sup>15</sup>

*And those of the left hand,  
how wretched are those of the left hand!  
In hot wind and boiling water,  
and the shade of black smoke,  
neither cool nor honourable.*<sup>16</sup>

Muhammad had originally promised that every Muslim would go to Heaven in the end; but there was an important qualification. "Some people behave like Muslims in front of other people, yet they are going to Hell. Other people behave like infidels yet they will be in Heaven." Serious sins turned a Muslim into an infidel: murder, adultery, theft, cutting ties with family, spiteful talking, disobeying Muhammad or "making mischief". Muslims who died before they had time to repent of those sins would be left in Hell forever, like any other unbeliever.

Inevitably, parents wanted to know what would happen to children who died in infancy. The good news was packaged with a menacing hint of a condition for the parents. "If you are a Muslim, your children are roaming freely in the heavenly garden. They will meet you at the eight gates of Heaven, and you will enter through whichever one you like."

Khadija asked what that meant for the two dead babies from her previous marriages. Would they be with their Muslim mother or with their polytheistic fathers?

“They are in Hell with the unbelievers,” he replied. Seeing her dismay, he added, “If you could see them now, you would hate them.”

“But my little ones didn’t live long enough to sin.”

“Allah knows what they would have done if they had lived. The believers and their children will be in Heaven, and the polytheists and their children will be in Hell.” Allah confirmed this insight with a new prophecy.

*Those who believe and their offspring follow them in faith,  
We will unite with them their offspring.*<sup>17</sup>

“The fire of Hell,” Muhammad warned, “is seventy times as hot as earthly fire.”

“By Allah!” exclaimed his audience, “isn’t ordinary fire hot enough?”

“Even the best person in Hell,” he said, “will stand on two glowing coals. Hellfire is like boiling oil. The sinner will be forced to drink it. When it comes near him, it will melt his face, and his skin will fall off into it. It will be poured over his head and sink into his insides. It will slice through his bowels, and they will trickle out of his anus and pour over his feet and melt away. Then he will be put back together again, and it will happen all over again.”<sup>18</sup>

The Hashimites, despite their great loyalty to Muhammad, were not convinced by his colourful preaching. They were merchants who had travelled northward. They knew that the Persians also talked about the Bridge of Death, the fires of Hell and a vast shady tree in Heaven. The Persians also believed in shining-bright female spirits of air and light, although the Persian variety were non-sexual. Most of the Hashimites followed Abu Talib’s example and continued to worship their idols.

Another theme of Muhammad’s prophecies was Allah’s instruction not to bother any more with the stubborn Quraysh.

*Nay! they are an inordinate people.  
Then turn your back upon them for you are not to blame;  
And continue to remind, for surely the reminder profits the believers.  
And I have not created the jinn and the men  
except that they should serve Me.  
I do not desire from them any sustenance  
and I do not desire that they should feed Me ...  
Therefore woe to those who disbelieve ...*<sup>19</sup>

The Quraysh could ignore Islam as long as Muhammad was out of action in the ravine and half his followers were in Ethiopia. Perhaps the only Muslims to continue their ordinary lives were Abu Bakr, Umar, a handful of slaves and a few women who were married to polytheists. These people on their own were not powerful enough to present much of a threat to the Quraysh.

The Hashim clan did not dare leave the ravine for eight months of the year, for people who met them in the streets would beat them up. Only during the four sacred months, when the Hashimites knew that nobody would attack them, were they able to walk around Mecca safely. Although, due to the boycott, they still could not buy food on the open market, they could stock up with their black-market suppliers.<sup>20</sup>

The clan were barricaded in the mountain gorge for three years. Yet very little is known about it. Neither Muhammad nor anyone else ever spoke very much about that period of their lives, which is a strange omission from the records. Although it would have been boring to sit around in the ravine all day without much work to do, it is possible that the real hardships did not begin until the end of that period.

In the third year, Khadija's money ran out. It was only when the Hashimites had no way of buying food that the blockade could finally achieve its original aim of starving them. They became hungry. One man found a dirty piece of camel-skin. He was so desperate that he washed it, baked it, crushed it between two stones

and then ate it dry, forced down with a drink of water. He had no more food for the next three days. People in Mecca, living on the cliffs on either side, could hear the screams of the starving Hashim children arising from the gorge. It is said that some of the Quraysh rejoiced over this, while others felt sorry.<sup>21</sup>

Seeing that the Hashim clan had become weak with hunger, the Quraysh elders once again tried to negotiate with Muhammad. The high chief Walid Makhzum and some others approached him at the Kaaba and made him an offer.

“Muhammad,” they said, “let’s combine our religions. We will worship Allah, and you can worship our gods. Whichever religion turns out to be better, everyone will share in its goodness.”

“I don’t want that,” Muhammad replied. “If that’s the condition, keep your religion to yourselves, and I’ll keep mine.” The truth was, the polytheists already worshipped “Allah” among their other gods, and they were not offering to acknowledge Allah’s prophet, so Muhammad recognised their offer for what it was: no real concession at all. Allah’s opinion soon followed.<sup>22</sup>

*Say: O unbelievers!*

*I do not serve that which you serve,*

*nor do you serve Him Whom I serve:*

*nor am I going to serve that which you serve,*

*nor are you going to serve Him Whom I serve:*

*you shall have your religion and I shall have my religion.*<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, Muhammad knew that he could not leave his clan starving in the gorge indefinitely. He realised that that the elders’ offer had made some sense. If they were in a mood to make peace, he could exploit this to end the boycott.

He did not even wait for the sacred months to begin – another sign that, whatever the Quraysh had threatened, he could walk the streets in relative safety. In May 619 Muhammad stood on the steps of the Kaaba to announce a new prophecy.



*By the star when it descends,  
Your companion has not strayed, nor has he erred ...*<sup>24</sup>

The crowds listened silently, and their ears pricked up as he reached the words:

*Have you thought of Al-Lat and Al-Uzza  
and Manat\* the third, the other?  
these are the exalted Flying Ones  
whose intercession is approved.*

The polytheists were very impressed by these words and they repeated them eagerly. They were overjoyed that Muhammad was permitting the worship of three of their principal goddesses. When Muhammad prostrated at the end of his recitation, all the polytheists prostrated alongside the Muslims (except for old Walid Makhzum, who was too stiff to bend to the earth, so he rubbed a symbolic handful of earth on his forehead instead).

In the emotion of the moment, none of the Muslims noticed how the new revelation was inconsistent with their strict monotheism. They exclaimed, "We will serve the Flying Ones so that They may bring us near to Allah," not suspecting any mistake or heresy but assuming that the words came from Allah.

After this ecumenical act of worship, several of the polytheists wanted to annul the boycott against the Hashim clan.

Knowing they were in this benevolent mood, Muhammad made one of his forays into town. He noticed that the document of boycott, after three years of being nailed up outside, was in poor condition, for woodworm had chewed some of the words. He never admitted how the beetles had managed to damage the very public parchment without anyone noticing. He told Uncle Abu Talib, "Allah has told me that He has given woodworm power over the deed of boycott. They have left the name of Allah in the

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\* Manat was a destiny-goddess worshipped by the Khuza'a tribe in Mecca, its Mustaliq clan in Qudayd and the related Lion and Wolf tribes in Medina.

document and eaten the words ordering spite and injustice against us.”\*

Abu Talib was so confident of Muhammad’s observation that he entered the town hall while the elders were conferring. “Look at your document,” he told them. “If it is as Muhammad says, you must end the boycott. If he is lying, I hand him over to you.”

They looked, and those who could read agreed that Abu Talib was right. The heading, *In Thy Name, O Allah*, remained; most of the other words had been eaten.

“Why should we be besieged and blockaded?” asked Abu Talib. “The matter is now clear.”

After Abu Talib had returned to the mountain, five of the elders formed an alliance. They gathered the council and made speeches.

“Citizens of Mecca, are we to feed and clothe ourselves while the Hashim clan perish, unable to buy or sell? By the gods, I will not sit down until this evil boycotting document is torn up!”

Mr Stupid opposed the motion, but he was outvoted. Muhammad had acknowledged their three goddesses; innocent children were starving; and if Allah had not sent worms to speak His opinion, it would be difficult to prove alternative theories to the superstitious. The Quraysh overturned the boycott, and an elder ripped up the mutilated parchment.

In August 622 the five allies then took up their weapons and marched to Abu Talib’s ravine. They called to the Hashim clan and invited them to return to their houses. The Hashimites filed out from the gorge, and their friends escorted them through the streets to their homes.<sup>25</sup>

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\* This would not have been difficult to arrange, even for an illiterate man. The Quraysh always began their legal deeds with the words *In Thy Name, O Allah*. It would have been easy enough to introduce the insects to the bottom of the page and to remove them before they reached the heading.

## Summary

- Umar – a strong, clever and wealthy bully – converted to Islam. This made Muhammad much more powerful.
- The Quraysh became afraid that Muhammad would succeed in controlling the whole city. They tried to kill him by declaring a boycott against the Hashim clan.
- The boycott lasted for three years. The Hashimites had to shelter in a mountain gorge on the edge of Mecca, where they were hungry.
- Muhammad continued to prophesy about Heaven, Hell and curses on his enemies.
- When he praised three of the Arabian goddesses, the Quraysh lifted the boycott.

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## References and Notes to Chapter 5: *The Satanic Verses*

1 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 133, 155, 159, 174, 238, 291, 313. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:232; (Bewley) 3:203; 8:32, 37, 161, 165. Ibn Saad. Suyuti (Jarrett) 112.

2 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 115-117, 130, 146-149, 155-156, 159, 167-168, 217. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 715 #161. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:294, 299, 302-305, 307, 313-315, 8:114. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:99. Suyuti (Jarrett) 112. Guillaume (1960) 40.

3 Q20:1-5 (Shakir).

4 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 116, 156-159. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 13-15. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 715 #157. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:205-207, 298-299; 8:188. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:321. Suyuti (Jarrett) 113-119. Guillaume (1960) 40-41. It is unlikely that the messenger would have incriminated Umm Jamil – a member of his own family and a fellow-Muslim – unless Muhammad had first assured him that she would be in no real danger. Neither Khabbab nor Umm Jamil need have been complicit in the plot.

5 Bukhari 5:57:14, 26. Suyuti (Jarrett) 122, 125.

6 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 155-159, 171. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:231-232; (Bewley) 3:207. Bukhari 3:37:494. Suyuti (Jarrett) 116-117, 119.

7 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 159-160, 172. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 721 #201. Waqidi (Faizer) 408. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:217, 241. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 2:27-28, 30, 4:295. Guillaume (1960) 34-35.

8 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 107, 160-161, 172. Waqidi (Faizer) 408. Ibn Hanbal (Cairo) 6#24908. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:241. Bukhari 1:1:3; 4:55:605; 6:60:478; 9:87:111. Muslim 1:301. Tirmidhi 4:8:2288. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 2:28, 30, 32, 90, 4:295. Guillaume (1960) 34-35. Khadija's cousin, Abu'l-Bakhtari, was an elder and not a Muslim.

9 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 314-316. Ibn Saad 3:32; 8:26. Ibn Hajar, *Isaba* 6 #9013. Umm

Kulthum's marriage to Utba was so embarrassing that Muslim historians insist that it was never consummated. Nevertheless, the earliest account (Ibn Ishaq 314) also asserts that one of Muhammad's daughters was living with Utba at his expense.

10 Q23:1-5, 8-11. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 107, 161. Bukhari 1:1:3; 4:55:605; 9:87:111. Muslim 1:301. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 1:279, 288-289, 293-295. Muir (1861) 2:188

11 Q56:27-34 (Shakir).

12 Q55:56, 58, 70, 72, 74, 76 (Shakir).

13 Q7:43; 37:48-49; 38:52; 44:54; 52:20; 56:22-23; 78:33. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 191. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:62, 177, 193. Bukhari 6:60:401, 402, 403. Muslim 1:362; 31:5966; 40:6793, 6795, 6796, 6797, 6798, 6800, 6802, 6803, 6804, 6805, 6806. Tirmidhi 4:12:2535, 12:2536, 2537, 2539, 2541, 2545, 2571; 6:46:3878. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q66:11. Ibn Hajar, *Tabdhib* 12 #13860. Majlisi (Rizvi) 2:185, 661. Muir (1861) 2:141-144. Tisdall (1905) 69-70. Sell (1923) 25-26. Bell (1953, 1970) "The Chronology of the Quran."

14 Q21:98-100 (Shakir).

15 Q23:103-104 (Shakir).

16 Q56:41-44 (Shakir).

17 Q25:21 (Shakir).

18 Q3:192; 19:72; 32:20. Malik 9:75. Ibn Hanbal (Khattab) 1:524-525 #1131. Bukhari 1:1:60; 1:3:57, 96, 130; 1:4:164, 166; 1:12:770; 2:23:330; 3:43:620; 3:48:838; 4:52:64; 4:53:391; 5:59:318; 8:73:13; 8:76:470, 471, 537, 542, 558, 564, 571, 572, 577; 9:89:319; 9:92:384; 9:93:519, 532, 542, 600; *Mufrad* 8:145; 25:461; Muslim 1:104, 109, 349, 352, 367, 368, 371; 31:6090; 32:6199, 6200; 33:6408; 40:6811, 6815, 6816, 6840, 6841, 6842. Abu Dawud 12:2218; 14:2754; 25:3658; 41:4672; 42:4853, 4865. Nasai 3:23:2564, 2565; 5:38:2625; 5:45:4751, 4752, 4873; 5:46:4874, 4875; 6:51:5662, 5663. Tirmidhi 1:1:4; 1:2:413; 2:8:1187; 4:10:2351, 2353, 2354; 4:13:2581, 2582, 2583, 2597, 2604; 5:38:2625; 5:44:3241. Ibn Maja 1:6:1604; 3:10:2054; 5:36:3936; 5:37:4122, 4123, 4201, 4268, 4279, 4281. Dhahabi 2 #107. Ibn Hajar, *Bulugh* 16:1548.

19 Q51:53b-57, 60 (Shakir).

20 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 155, 171, 194. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:241. Bukhari 3:37:494. Guillaume (1960) 35.

21 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 160. Waqidi (Faizer) 408. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:217, 241. Guillaume (1960) 35, 43.

22 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 165.

23 Q109:1-6 (Shakir).

24 Q53:2-3 (Shakir).

25 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 165-166, 172-173. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 723 #212. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:236-239, 241-243. Bukhari 2:19:173, 2:19:176; 5:58:192; 6:60:385, 386. Abu Dawud 7:1401. Guillaume (1960) 38. For Manat, see Ibn Ishaq 38-39 and Ibn al-Kalbi (Faris) 12-13.

## *Sorrows and Strife*

**September 619 – September 622**

Muhammad had no intention of worshipping Al-Lat, Al-Uzza and Manat forever. Once the Hashim clan had settled back in Mecca, secure of their food supplies and safe from assault, his next task was to restore Islam to being a one-God religion.

“The angel Gabriel has been complaining,” he told the Muslims. “He told me that I have prophesied to you something that he did not reveal from Allah and that I have said something that I was not told to say. He says that he takes no responsibility for those words or for the effect that they have had on you. It was Satan who put those words on my tongue. I am devastated by my mistake! This is what Allah was really saying:

*Have you thought of Al-Lat and Al-Uzza  
and Manat the third, the other?  
Are yours the males and His the females?  
That were indeed an unfair division!”<sup>1</sup>*

That is, Allah had only mentioned the polytheistic goddesses to mock them, for why would Allah have only daughters when mere humans could have sons?

The Muslims were not perturbed; they accepted Muhammad’s confession of error. The polytheists felt cheated. They recognised at once that “he has recanted his words about the relationship between our gods and Allah, and now he has changed it and is saying something else!”

“I only said it,” Muhammad said, “because I was anxious for your welfare and longed for a way to attract you to Allah.”

The polytheists believed he had fabricated the false prophecy only to persuade them to repeal the boycott, and they once again

became hostile toward the Muslims. Whenever they passed Muhammad in the streets, they mocked him by sneering, "These are the exalted Flying Ones! Their intercession is approved!"

The storyteller Nadir Abdaldar said that Islam was unconvincing. "If Allah wanted us to believe you, why didn't He send down an angel to stand beside you and tell us about you?"

Other men teased him about the poverty of his companions. "If Islam were any good," they said, "Allah would not have given it to lowly people like Ammar and Khabbab before He gave it to us!"

One elder even mocked him for not having any sons.<sup>2</sup>

In the autumn 41 of the Muslims who had fled to Ethiopia arrived back in Mecca. After hearing about the Satanic Verses, they had jumped to the conclusion that the whole city had converted to Islam. They were only an hour away from Mecca when travellers from the opposite direction told them that they had been misinformed and that it was *not* a safe time to return home. They crept into the city quietly and begged formal protection from powerful citizens.

Muhammad's daughter Ruqayya and her husband Uthman were among those who returned. They now had a baby son, Abdallah. Ruqayya's beauty had caused a great stir in Abyssinia. Young men had gaped at her and danced up to stare more closely until she had almost lost patience with the host population.

She continued to distract men after her return to Arabia. Muhammad once sent his young grandson Usama with a gift of meat to her house. Usama lost all track of time as he found himself staring from Ruqayya to Uthman and back again, for he had never seen a more attractive couple.

While nobody was under a death-threat any more, the city was full of minor conflicts. Seven Muslims were being kept under house arrest by their families. Another Muslim heckled a poet so aggressively that an irate man in the audience blacked his eye.

There was even a quarrel between the Hashim and the Makhzum when polytheists from both clans wanted to protect the same Muslim. Muhammad produced prophecies to answer every jibe.<sup>3</sup>

*And certainly messengers before you were mocked at,  
but that which they mocked at  
encompassed the scoffers among them.*<sup>4</sup>

*They are losers indeed who reject the meeting of Allah;  
until when the hour comes upon them all of a sudden they shall say:  
“O our grief for our neglecting it!”*<sup>5</sup>

Against this background rumble of low-level tension, Khadija became ill. Muhammad comforted her with the reminder that Allah had promised her a jewelled palace in Heaven. He said that her next-door neighbours in the afterlife would be the Virgin Mary and Queen Asiya, so she must give these co-wives his best wishes until the day when he joined them all in Heaven.

She died on 22 April 620. It is said that Muhammad did not have enough cash in the house to buy her a shroud and so he had to wrap her in his own cloak. He buried her in Mount Hajun Cemetery near Mecca.

Muhammad was so distraught over Khadija's death that his friends feared he would die of grief. For the rest of his life, he spoke warmly and often of her and sometimes he seemed overwhelmed by sorrow at her absence. He used to say: “Khadija believed in me when they disbelieved; she called me truthful when they called me a liar; she financed me when nobody else gave me anything; and she was the only woman who ever bore me a son. Allah Himself nurtured love for her in my heart.”<sup>6</sup>

Muhammad's friends urged him to marry again. Obviously no non-Muslim would accept him; and among the Muslims, there were far more men than women. Muhammad was now 49 and he had gained a lot of weight, to say nothing of grey hairs, bloodshot eyes and a gap between his two front teeth. He was also bankrupt.<sup>7</sup>

Despite these disadvantages, Muhammad found a woman who was willing to take him; and less than three weeks after burying Khadija, he married again.

His new wife, Saowda, was a tall, fat widow about ten years younger than himself, a tanner by trade. She was kindly, cheerful and somewhat naïve, devoted to Muhammad and to Islam. He lived with her more or less happily for several years. However, Saowda never replaced Khadija in his love, and he never intended that she should be his only wife. In later life, he lost interest in her and even considered divorcing her.<sup>8</sup>

A few days after this, he also married Abu Bakr's daughter Aisha, who was slim and very pretty with fair, rosy colouring. This marriage was only a legal contract. Aisha remained in her father's house, not even knowing that she was married, for she was only six years old.<sup>9</sup>

Muhammad's Uncle Abu Talib, who was nearly eighty years old, died on 27 May. In his final illness, Abu Sufyan, Mr Stupid and Umayya Juma clustered around him, begging: "Call your nephew so that we can all agree that he will leave us alone and we will leave him alone; let him have his religion and we will have ours."

Muhammad only told them yet again that they must abandon their idols and declare Allah to be the only God. Then he turned to Abu Talib and urged him: "Uncle, you must recite 'There is no god but Allah' so that I can ask Allah to show you mercy on Resurrection Day."

Mr Stupid interrupted: "Abu Talib, you wouldn't abandon your father's religion, would you?"

Muhammad repeated his challenge, and Mr Stupid repeated his, and both of them kept badgering him, while Abu Talib tried to pacify everyone without committing himself to anything. In the end he confessed: "I still believe my father's religion."

After Mr Stupid had left, Abu Talib seemed to be trying to say



something. His brother Abbas put his ear to the dying man's mouth and said, "Muhammad, he has just said what you told him to say!"

"I did not hear it," Muhammad replied.

Abu Talib died at that moment.

Later Abbas asked Muhammad whether Abu Talib's constant protection of Muhammad had earned him any favour with Allah. Muhammad replied, "Yes, I can arrange to put him in the shallowest, least painful part of Hell, where the fire only reaches up to his ankles. Yet even that is hot enough to boil his brains."<sup>10</sup>

Abu Talib's death was a disaster for Muhammad, for he had lost his protector. For several days he was afraid to go outside.

At first his uncle Mr Redface tried to reconcile with him. "Do what you like, Muhammad, for you are safe as long as I live!"

However, when Mr Stupid and Uqba Umayya challenged Mr Redface to ask where his father was now, Muhammad admitted that his grandfather Abdalmuttalib was in Hell like all other polytheists.

Mr Redface was furious; he declared everlasting hostility and withdrew his protection.<sup>11</sup>

After that the Quraysh behaved in ways they would never have dared while Abu Talib was alive. Mr Redface and Uqba Umayya, who lived next door to him, set an example of petty harassments. They used to dump household rubbish on his doorstep, while Mr Redface's wife spread thorny branches in his pathway. Once they threw a sheep's uterus at him while he was praying, which forced him to duck behind a wall to say his prayers. Another time they threw it in his cooking-pot. He fished it out on a stick, pleading, "Cousins, what sort of neighbours are you?" before tossing it into the street. When Uqba, on a dare from a friend, spat in Muhammad's face, Allah sent down a personal rebuke:

*The unjust one shall bite his hands saying:  
 "O! would that I had taken a way with the Messenger!  
 O woe is me! would that I had not taken such a one for a friend!  
 Certainly he led me astray from the reminder after it had come to me;  
 and the Shaytan fails to aid man."*<sup>12</sup>

When a young man threw dust on his head, Muhammad saw that the harassment had spread to other citizens.

Mr Stupid waited for him to prostrate in prayer at the Kaaba then incited Uqba Umayya to shove camel entrails on his back. Fatima, then aged fourteen, arrived on the scene to find a group of elders hooting with laughter over her father's discomfort. She scraped the mess off his shoulders, flung it to the ground and invoked curses on the unknown culprit. Muhammad arose from his prostration and beseeched Allah to destroy the tricksters, whom he named out loud for Fatima's benefit.<sup>13</sup>

He realised he would have to find himself a new protector. In June he and his son Zayd travelled to Taïf, three days' journey to the east, hoping to win the sympathy of the chiefs there. He spoke to every significant person in the city, but nobody took any interest. One chief said: "Don't let me ever speak to you again! If you are Allah's messenger, you are far too important to notice me; and if you're lying about Allah, I am wrong to speak to you!"

Afraid that some of their youths might convert to Islam, the chiefs ordered him to leave town. Evidently he did not leave fast enough, for the chiefs incited a mob to gather around him. The city louts yelled insults and hurled stones at him until his feet bled and Zayd, trying to shield his father, was hit in the head.

Utba Abdshams and his brother happened to be in Taïf; although they had opposed Muhammad in Mecca, they felt so sorry for him that they let him shelter under their vine-trellis and eat their grapes. They became annoyed when he seized this opportunity to try to convert their slave to Islam.

On the journey home, Zayd asked, "How will we manage to enter Mecca safely, since they have banished us?" Muhammad replied that Allah would find a way, but he was demoralised by the failure of his visit. His night prayers were disturbed by fears that seven *jinn* were chasing him.<sup>14</sup>

At the city gates he sent a messenger to enquire for anyone who would be willing to act as his protector. Eventually an elder named Mutim Naowfal agreed.

When Muhammad and Zayd entered the city, Mutim's family was posted at the Kaaba in full armour. Mutim stood up on his horse, proclaiming: "O Quraysh! I have taken Muhammad under my protection!"

He had to convince Mr Stupid that he was not converting to Islam; but in the end Mr Stupid respected that Mutim was only protecting his neighbour. So Mutim's family encircled Muhammad and Zayd and escorted them home.<sup>15</sup>

Muhammad was now safe in Mecca. Yet he was still looking for a different kind of protector, someone who would help him fight the Quraysh and take over Mecca. The pilgrimage season had begun, and Muhammad struck up conversations with every visiting pilgrim who looked important.

In Aqaba Gully at the edge of the city, he met six men who had just finished their pilgrimage. He introduced himself: "I am a prophet sent by Allah. Who are you?" The men said they were from Medina, so Muhammad asked if they were allies of the Jews there.

"Yes!" the men exclaimed. "This must be the prophet whom the Jews threatened. Don't let them reach him before we do!"

One of the men, Asad Najjar, already believed in only one God. He explained that their Jewish neighbours had often warned them to stop raiding Jewish lands because they expected a prophet to arise who would kill all their enemies. Asad would be delighted to

be onside with this prophet. Even better, it turned out that he was related to Muhammad. The six men listened with open ears.

“Allah commands you to worship Him and renounce all other gods,” Muhammad told them. “If you believe in me and protect me, you will be rewarded with a place in Heaven.” He recited the Quraan, and they agreed to become Muslims.

“In order to bring Allah’s message to the people,” Muhammad said, “I need support.”

The six men responded, “We will do it for Allah and His Messenger!” Unfortunately, they could not offer immediate protection. The people of Medina were full of resentment and always fighting each other; as long as that lasted, there could not be any united effort for Muhammad. Perhaps, said the six men, their hope of reconciliation lay in uniting against some common enemy. “So we’ll go to our tribes and try to make peace, and we’ll meet you here next year.”

Then they returned to Medina to tell their friends that the Jews’ prophet had arrived and that he was a member of Asad’s family.

Six men were not enough to start a war, so Muhammad continued his search for allies. He made the rounds of all the trade-fairs in the neighbouring cities. He spoke to every major tribe: the Abs, the Bakka, the Fazara, the Ghassan, the Hadarima, the Hanifa, the Kaab, the Kalb, the Kilab, the Kinda, the Muharib, the Murra, the Sulaym and the Udhra. He even met members of the Nadir, a Jewish tribe in Medina. He made the same offer to everyone who would listen to him – and to several who would not.

At these conversations, Muhammad was always tagged by Mr Redface, dapper in his striped cloak and two pigtails. As soon as Muhammad finished speaking, his uncle would interject: “Ignore this liar! He just wants you to dump Al-Lat and Al-Uzza for his new heresy. Don’t listen!” Most people then responded, “If your own family don’t believe in you, why should we?”

One Arab asked, "If we help you defeat your enemies, will you make us your governors?" When Muhammad replied that Allah would decide that later, the Arab countered, "I suppose you want us to risk our lives to protect you so that you can reward someone else if you win! No, thank you!"

Only one tribe, the Daows, converted to Islam, and they were of no help at all. For the next eight years they worshipped Allah with Islamic ritual at their home on the coast of Yemen; but they never offered any military assistance to Muhammad.<sup>16</sup>

Between trade-fairs, Muhammad started up a new business providing secure storage for other people's valuables. It was modestly successful because the Quraysh knew how particular he was about being honest with property. At the same time, this passive income gave him free time to plot against the very people who were paying him – and they knew it. The Quraysh could not hurt him physically because he was living under Mutim's protection but they mocked him more bitterly than ever.<sup>17</sup>

One morning Muhammad stood up in front of the Kaaba and announced that he had travelled to Jerusalem and back during the night.

"The angel Gabriel awoke me from sleep," he said, "and brought me a white, long-eared mule with wings. Its name was Flash. After I mounted it, each step that it took travelled as far as the eye can see." Gabriel flew beside Flash and Muhammad as they sped away to Jerusalem. A host of prophets were gathered there: Abraham, Moses, Jesus and others. Gabriel ushered Muhammad forward, and he led them all in prayer in the temple. The prophets told him: "We were all commissioned to declare that Allah is One."

He said that when he had finished his business in Jerusalem, a fine ladder was brought. He and Gabriel climbed it together and reached the gate of Heaven. At the lowest level of Heaven sat Adam, watching as the spirits of his descendants passed in front of him and labelling each believer as good and each infidel as evil.

There was also an unsmiling angel, Malik, who was the Keeper of Hell. Muhammad asked permission to visit Hell, and Malik removed a covering. The flames of Hell blazed high into the air and seemed to fill the space.

Through the flames Muhammad glimpsed some of the damned. He saw men with camel-mouths who had stolen the property of orphans; they kept thrusting blocks of fire into their mouths and then excreting them from their rear-ends. He saw usurers with stomachs as large as houses who were being endlessly trampled by thirsty camels. He saw adulterous men being forced to eat putrid meat. He saw adulteresses hanging by their breasts because they had tricked their husbands into providing for illegitimate children. Afraid that the flames would burn up everything, Muhammad had to ask Malik to replace the cover of Hell.

Then Gabriel took Muhammad up through the second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth levels of Heaven, each inhabited by a different prophet. Finally they reached the seventh Heaven, a quiet place where the only sound was the creaking of pens. On a throne at the gate of the Holy Palace sat Abraham.

At that point, Muhammad received a revelation from Allah: the Muslims must pray fifty times a day! Muhammad returned to the sixth Heaven, where Moses asked him what Allah had said. Moses thought that fifty times a day was too much, and he urged Muhammad to renegotiate. So Muhammad returned to Allah and begged for fewer prayers. Backed by Moses, Muhammad managed to secure a promise that five prayers a day, performed in faith and trust, would be just as good as fifty.

After this Gabriel took Muhammad further into Heaven, where they saw a vast multi-coloured lote tree with leaves like elephant-ears and fruits like earthenware jugs, and four rivers flowed out of its roots. The earth was made of musk, and it was covered with pavilions made of pearls. He also saw one of the dark-eyed heavenly brides, a beautiful maiden with crimson lips, who told

him that she belonged to his son Zayd.

The Quraysh laughed at this story. They went to tell Abu Bakr, asking, "What do you think of your friend now?"

Thinking they were lying, Abu Bakr hurried to the Kaaba, where he found Muhammad re-telling the story. He loyally asserted: "If he says so, then it is true. If Allah can send a message from Heaven in just one hour, why do you boggle at this?"

When Muhammad had finished his tale, the sceptics demanded that he describe the temple at Jerusalem for them. Nervously, for he had no idea what it should look like, he began a description. Every time he paused for breath, Abu Bakr, who had travelled in Syria, exclaimed: "That is correct! I testify that you are Allah's Messenger!" When he had completed his description, Muhammad turned to Abu Bakr and said, "And you, Abu Bakr, are the Truthful Man."

After that Muslims often called Abu Bakr "the Truthful", not in the sense that he was personally honest but because he had "witnessed to the truth". Obviously this did not make him a credible witness to the polytheists. They knew that he was so close to Muhammad that he would say whatever his Prophet wanted. Besides, there must have been somebody in Mecca who had seen Jerusalem and was able to reveal that it had no temple at all. In addition, anyone who dealt with Persian merchants might have known the legend of Arta Viraf, a young Zoroastrian priest who had visited Heaven and Hell with an angel-guide and had seen God sitting on a golden throne.

Muhammad found that he had gone too far. Although most of his followers were poor people who believed whatever he told them, even they doubted that he had really made the Night Journey. He told them that Allah had organised the Night Journey as a test to prove who had real faith. When this did not convince them either, he changed his story. He admitted that Allah had taken only his spirit to Jerusalem and Heaven while his body had remained on

earth. It had not been a miraculous journey but an ordinary dream.

Unfortunately, by the time he thought of this sensible explanation, it was too late to cover up his original story. His claim that he had literally travelled to Heaven on a winged mule was known all over Mecca. Many of the Muslims were so disillusioned that they abandoned Islam forever.<sup>18</sup>

Khabbab the swordsmith believed in the Night Journey but he objected to the rigid enforcement of noon prayers. He led a group, probably those Muslims who were too poor to own a cloak to spread on the ground, to appeal the new rule. "It hurts to bow down on the burning sand. Can we pray it earlier in the day? Can you make the prayer shorter?" Muhammad ignored this complaint. Allah had spoken; and Khabbab could be trusted not to lose faith over a little pain.

Abu Bakr also remained faithful, for he did not learn from disappointment. Back in 615, he had bet a hundred camels that the Roman Empire would win the war against Persia within six years. The six years ended in May 621, and the Romans had still not managed to win a battle, so Abu Bakr had to pay up. One hundred camels was a public matter, so everyone was reminded that Muhammad's one testable prophecy had not come true.<sup>19</sup>

At exactly this point, when it seemed that Muhammad's mission was self-destructing in a mess of disbelief and discontent, his new friends reappeared. His allies from Medina arrived in Mecca for the pilgrimage, and this time they had brought six more friends with them. The twelve men met Muhammad at Aqaba Gully and swore to take him as their chief. They agreed to become Muslims and to obey him in "anything right," and Muhammad promised that they would go to Heaven if they kept this vow. The exact nature of "anything right" was left vague; there was no mention of war.

Twelve men were still not enough to start a war against the Quraysh; but Muhammad knew by now that he would not receive a better offer from any other tribe. So he had to commit himself



to a future in Medina. He sent the affable Musaab Abdaldar to Medina to speed things up by propagating Islam there.

Musaab led the prayers five times a day. He taught the converts about Islam and he recited the Quraan at every opportunity. He lodged with Asad Najjar, who hated the Jews and proved a faithful assistant in the mission.

As chief of the Najjar clan, Asad was able to influence several of them to become Muslims, and he also rounded up forty of his neighbours. His maternal cousin, Saad, was chief of the Nabit clan and high chief of the whole Wolf tribe. Saad Nabit was so impressed by Musaab's reciting of the Quraan that he converted to Islam and then threatened to excommunicate any member of his clan who remained a polytheist. So the whole clan converted. It was another clan, the Jusham, who built Medina's first mosque. Soon every polytheistic clan in Medina had some Muslims, except for the Aowsmanat, whose sceptical chief forbade them to have anything to do with the new heresy.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile Muhammad had to wait it out in Mecca. He knew that he would need the Jews of Medina to recognise him as a prophet, so his prophecies acquired a Jewish flavour. He announced that Allah forbade Muslims to eat certain meats: all pork; anything contaminated with blood; or anything slaughtered in the name of another god. Therefore animals must be slaughtered in the name of Allah and in such a way as to drain the blood off the meat.

The tone of the Quraan also changed. There was less poetry; Muhammad's new revelations were narrative stories about the prophets. Noah and his pairs of animals escaped the flood in the ark. Job suffered "toil and torment" from Satan until Allah mercifully answered his prayers. Strange visitors promised a son to the elderly Abraham. The Egyptian army, pursuing Moses, was drowned in the Red Sea. Jonah was swallowed by a fish. Joseph, in a lengthy narrative, boasted of dreams, was sold into slavery in Egypt, resisted the seduction of Zulayka, interpreted Pharaoh's

dreams, was promoted to Prime Minister and was finally reconciled with his brothers.

Muhammad's retellings of these stories often differed from the versions in the Bible. Noah laughed at the drowned sinners. Allah instructed Job to beat his wife with a green branch so as not to break an oath. Abraham knocked over the idols of Ur, and the idolaters threatened to burn him in a furnace. It was in response to Moses' preaching that Pharaoh commanded the slaying of the Israelite babies; and the same Pharaoh commanded Haman to build him a sky-high tower so that he could look at Moses' god. In a word, anything that Muhammad had not invented himself came from the Talmud, not the Tanakh,\* although to the end of his life he never understood the difference.<sup>21</sup>

The theme was always the same: the prophet told people to worship Allah alone, but the people did not listen, and so they suffered Allah's wrath.

*Every nation purposed against their messenger to destroy him, and they disputed by means of the falsehood that they might thereby render null the truth, therefore I destroyed them ... they are the inmates of the Fire.*<sup>22</sup>

*So each We punished for his sin; of them was he on whom We sent down a violent storm, and of them was he whom the rumbling overtook, and of them was he whom We made to be swallowed up by the earth, and of them was he whom We drowned; and it did not beseem Allah that He should be unjust to them, but they were unjust to their own souls.*<sup>23</sup>

He also provided the answers to a few scientific questions. He said that shooting-stars were missiles flung by angels to keep away evil

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\* The Jewish holy book is called the *Tanakh*; it is divided into the *Torah*, the *Nevi'im* and the *Ketuvim*. The *Talmud* is not part of the *Tanakh* but is a commentary on it. Muhammad incorrectly referred to all of these books indiscriminately as "Torah". He did, however, refer separately to the *Zabur*, or Book of David, by which he meant the Psalms (Q4:163; 17:55; 21:105).

*jinn* who were trying to spy on the affairs of Heaven. The purpose of mountains was to prevent earthquakes. A certain sign that Allah existed was that birds could fly; flight ought to be impossible, but birds stayed up in the sky because Allah was holding them there.

The Quraysh continued to jeer at him.<sup>24</sup>

When the next pilgrimage season arrived, the delegation from Medina included 75 newly-converted Muslims. Late in the night of 30 June–1 July 622, they crept out from the Medinan caravan to meet with Muhammad in Aqaba Gully.

His Uncle Abbas spoke for him. “People of Medina,” he said, “Muhammad has no need to leave Mecca, for he is respected and safe among his own family, and all of us, Muslim or not, defend him. Yet he is willing to turn away from us to join you. Please don’t bother with this unless you are serious and unless you all agree. You have promised to be his protectors. His enemies will strike at you like one man, so if you can keep your promise to protect him from them, then hoist that burden tonight.”

“We are listening!” they replied. “We will keep our promise. We are ready to sacrifice our lives for Allah’s Messenger.”

“Before tonight,” Muhammad told them, “Allah only commanded me to call people to Him and to endure insults and forgive. Since the Quraysh have mistreated the Muslims so much, Allah has now given me permission to fight in self-defence against our abusers.” He recited a new prophecy to them.

*And fight with them until there is no more persecution  
and religion should be only for Allah ...*<sup>25</sup>

“Therefore,” he concluded, “swear allegiance to me and vow to protect me like your own women and children.”

Strangely, the converts did not ask why the “safe and respected” prophet needed to defend himself against hostility and abuse. They only asked: “What will happen after we’ve won your wars for you? Will you return to Mecca and abandon us?”

“No,” said Muhammad. “I will war against those who war against you and be at peace with those at peace with you.”

“We agree to this,” they replied, “although it may cost us life and livelihood. What will we get in return?”

“Heaven!”

One by one they struck Muhammad’s hand and recited: “In the name of Allah, we swear allegiance to thee. We commit ourselves to war against all and sundry for Allah and His Messenger and we will protect thee as we protect our women. We pledge ourselves to complete obedience to thee, in weal and in woe, in ease and in hardship and in evil. We will not wrong anyone; we will speak the truth always; and in Allah’s service we shall fear no man’s censure.”

As soon as they had all pledged, a voice from the top of the gully shrieked: “Listen, people of Mecca! This villain and his converts have declared war on you!”

Muhammad hurriedly told his new disciples to return to camp. One of the men asked, “Why don’t we make a surprise attack on the city at dawn?” However, it turned out that no other man present had brought a sword. It was not in any case a practical plan, since there would be only 75 of them against the thousands of warriors living in or visiting Mecca; so Muhammad said that an immediate battle would not be necessary.

The spy was never identified; but, sure enough, the Quraysh elders knew by dawn that some of the Medinans had allied with Muhammad to declare war on them. They raced after the Medinan caravan, which had already started for home; but the only man whom they managed to capture turned out to be under Mutim’s protection, so they had to let him go.<sup>26</sup>

The Quraysh redoubled their harassments of the Muslims, but they still could not restrain Muhammad because of his protector Mutim. The Muslims complained to Muhammad, and he told them: “Allah has told me that you can emigrate to Medina. Anyone who likes

may go there.”

Over that summer, family by family, they liquidated their assets and set out in groups. Umar was among the first to go. They left quietly, but of course people noticed that over eighty Muslim men, plus women and children, had disappeared. Some of the Quraysh had to lock up their young men to prevent them from escaping. Muhammad did not set out with the rest; he and Abu Bakr lingered in Mecca for several weeks.<sup>27</sup>

Walid Makhzum, the high chief who led the opposition to Islam, had a scratch on his ankle. This wound unexpectedly re-opened, and the aged man died of it. Soon afterwards, another of Muhammad’s mockers died of dropsy, a third of pus in his head and a fourth of a thorn in his foot. A fifth did not die but he became blind. Muhammad announced a new prophecy,

*Surely We will suffice you against the scoffers,  
those who set up another god with Allah;  
so they shall soon know,*<sup>28</sup>

and said that the angel Gabriel had cursed these five men in particular many months ago. Allah’s curses were coming true!<sup>29</sup>

On 16 September 622 Muhammad’s ancient Aunt Ruqayqa warned him: “The Quraysh have plotted against you. They are going to kill you tonight.”

According to Ruqayqa’s spy, the Quraysh had finally devised a method of disposing of Muhammad that would not start a war in Mecca. One person from each clan would join the ambush. They would surround his house and all attack him together so that nobody would know who had struck the blow that killed him. No one in Mecca was powerful enough to retaliate by fighting all the Quraysh together; at worst, the clans would have to share the cost of blood-money to Muhammad’s family. All the elders had agreed to the killing, including Jubayr, a son of Mutim himself.

Muhammad needed to be absent from home. He gave rapid

instructions to Ali. "Sleep in my bed tonight, and wrap yourself in my green cloak, for nobody will hurt you. Tomorrow return all the goods in our storage to their owners." Then he hurried off to Abu Bakr's house.

"Allah has given us permission to emigrate," he announced. "We'll go together!"

Abu Bakr wept for joy at the news that he was privileged to be the Prophet's travelling companion. Always practical, he scooped his last 5,000 silver coins into his travelling bag, leaving nothing behind for his family. They climbed out of Abu Bakr's back window so that nobody would see them leaving the city and scrambled down the mountains to a remote, hidden cave.

That evening the assassins congregated around Muhammad's house. Peeking through the cracks in the door, they saw him lying in bed. Scrupulous over not attacking a man in his sleep, they determined to spring on him first thing in the morning. At dawn the sleeper awoke and threw the green cloak aside. The assassins saw that he was Ali.

Muhammad had escaped.<sup>30</sup>

### **Summary**

- Muhammad retracted his prophecy about the three goddesses and admitted that it had come from Satan. This made him very unpopular in Mecca. He was also bankrupt.
- Khadija died.
- Abu Talib also died, leaving Muhammad without a protector among unsympathetic neighbours. He later found a new protector called Mutim.
- Muhammad claimed that he had made a miraculous journey to Jerusalem and then to Heaven on a flying horse.
- He attempted to form military alliances with various

neighbouring tribes. Eventually some people from the city of Medina agreed to convert to Islam and to help him fight the Meccans.

- When the Quraysh heard about this, they plotted to kill him.
- Muhammad escaped the assassins and fled from Mecca.

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#### References and Notes to Chapter 6: *Sorrows and Strife*

1 Q53:19-22 (Guillaume).

2 Q6:8, 52ff; 108. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 165-167, 179-181. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:237. Guillaume (1960) 39.

3 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 167-170. Waqidi (Faizer) 36-38. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:238. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:112; (McDonald/Watt) 7:161. Suyuti (Jarrett) 155. Guillaume (1960) 38-39, 46.

4 Q6:10.

5 Q6:31a.

6 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 191. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 12. Ibn Hanbal (Cairo) 6#24908. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:243; (Bewley) 8:12, 44, 54, 152. Bukhari 5:58:164, 165, 166, 168; 7:62:156; 8:73:33. Muslim 31:5971, 5972, 5974. Tabari (Landau-Tasseron) 39:4, 161. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 2:90. Guillaume (1960) 49, 52. Majlisi (Rizvi) 2:661. For Muhammad's cloak, *see* Razwy (1997) chapter 15.

7 Q4:25. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 115-117, 135, 146-148, 214-218, 383. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:181; (Bewley) 8:39, 42-43, 152. Muslim 30:5776. Tirmidhi, *Shamail* 1:1, 7, 9, 14; 5:36, 37, 38, 39, 43. Tabari 9:129-130; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:170). Suyuti (Jarrett) 112. *See also* Bukhari 1:1:1; 1:2:52. *See also* Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q4:25.

8 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 309. Darimi (Tirmidhi), cited in Tabrizi (Robson) 1:662. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:39-42, 123, 127-128, 152. Bukhari 1:4:148; 2:26:740, 741; 3:47:766; 3:48:853; 6:60:318; 7:62:5, 134; 8:74:257; 8:78:677. Muslim 8:3451, 3452, 3455; 26:5395, 5396, 5397. Abu Dawud 2:2130; 14:2674. Nasai 5:41:4245. Nasai, *Kubra* 16 #8917. Tirmidhi 6:44:3040. Tabari (Poonawala) 9:129-130; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:170. Dhahabi 2 #131. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q4:128. Ibn Hajar, *Isaba* 5 #11357; 7 #11357. Guillaume (1960) 52. Saowda's exact age is unknown, but she reached menopause about 626 and she died in 674.

9 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 495. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:43-44, 51, 55, 89. Bukhari 3:48:829; 5:58:234, 236; 5:59:462; 6:60:435; 7:62:64, 65, 88, 145. Muslim 8:3309, 3310, 3311b, 3312. Abu Dawud 11:2116; 42:4915. Nasai 4:26:3257, 3380, 3381. Ibn Maja 3:9:1876. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:7; (Poonawala) 9:128-130; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:171. Guillaume (1960) 52.

10 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 191-192. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:136, 139, 243. Bukhari 5:58:222, 224; 6:60:197, 295; 8:78:672. Muslim 1:36, 408, 409, 411, 413.

11 Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:243-244.

12 Q25:27-29 (Shakir).

13 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 161, 164-165, 191. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:139, 232, 243-244. Bukhari 1:4:241; 1:9:499; 4:52:185; 4:53:409; 5:58:193. Muslim 19:4421, 4422. Tabari

(Watt/McDonald) 6:50, 114-115. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 2:99.

14 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 192-194. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:244-245.

15 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 194. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:245.

16 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 175-177, 194-197, 203. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:60, 249-253. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:120, 124-125. Guillaume (1960) 48. Muhammad's great-grandmother had been a member of the Najjar clan of the Lion tribe.

17 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 194-195, 224. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:250; (Bewley) 3:14. *See* Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:585. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:120; (Poonawala) 9:150-151.

18 Q17:60. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 182-188, 194. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 15-16. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:246, 247-249; (Bewley) 8:55. Bukhari 1:8:345; 4:54:429; 4:55:557; 5:58:226, 227, 228, 245; 9:93:608. Muslim 1:309, 313, 314. Tisdall (1905) 67-68. Fortescue (1910). Guillaume (1960) 58. *See also* Nasai 2:20:1632. *See also* Ibn Maja 3:12:2273. *See also* Tabari (Friedmann) 12:193-196. The mule's name was *Buraq*, which means "lightning" in Arabic; but it is the Persian word for "horsie".

19 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 225. Muslim 4:1294, 1295. Nasai 1:6:498. Tirmidhi 5:44:3193, 3194. Tabari (Bosworth) 5:326. Butler (1902, 1978) 123-127. Rome's first victory was not until autumn 622, too late for Abu Bakr's bet but still well within the ten years of Muhammad's prophecy. On the other hand, a bet of as much as 100 camels suggests that Abu Bakr's opponent was not betting against a single Roman success but on the final outcome of the whole war. The Romans did in fact win the war, but not until May 628, at least three years too late for Muhammad's prophecy of a "few" years.

20 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 112-113, 198-201, 209, 212, 219, 229, 235, 647. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:252-255. Bukhari 1:2:18. Abu Dawud 20:3088. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:126. *See also* Q60:12.

21 Q6:145; 16:114-115; 10:71-90; 11:25-27, 37-42, 69-73; 12:4-100; 16:14-15; 21:83-84; 37:75-98, 139-145; 38:41-44; 40:24-25, 36-37; 51:24-40; 71:1-28. *Cf* Genesis 6:9-7:24; 11:1-9, 27-32; Exodus 1:8-2:10; Job 2:7-10, 42:7-17. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 99, 180. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 13. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q2:173. Tisdall (1905) 16, 18-20, 35-36. Sell (1923) 74.

22 Q40:5-6 (Shakir).

23 Q16:40 (Shakir).

24 Q15:16-18; 16:15, 79; 37:6-10; 67:5; 72:8-9. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 187.

25 Q8:39 (Shakir).

26 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 201-206, 208, 212. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:255-259.

27 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 168, 213-218, 223, 230, 307, 329-330. Waqidi (Faizer) 37. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:261-262.

28 Q15:95-96 (Shakir).

29 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 187. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:6. Guillaume (1960) 56. There is no evidence that Muhammad mentioned Gabriel's curse on the five mockers until after they had already suffered their fates.

30 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 160-161, 221-225. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1: 263-265; (Bewley) 8:156-157. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6: 140-148. Kister (1974). Nobody knows who betrayed the assassination plot to Aunt Ruqayqa.



## *The Flight to Medina*

**September 622 – April 623**

Muhammad and Abu Bakr hid in the cave for three nights while the Meccans hunted high and low for them. A reward of a hundred camels was offered for Muhammad's capture. Once the search party, armed with swords and clubs, came right up to the mouth of the cave, but when they saw a thick spider's web across the entrance, they did not bother looking inside. Finally the Quraysh decided that the trail must be cold and they abandoned their search. Then Muhammad and Abu Bakr began their real journey.

A hired Bedouin guide led the way through the dark. Muhammad was riding a luxury-camel named Slit-Ear, and Abu Bakr shared his camel with his servant. The guide took them through the lowland and cross-country route along the minor tracks northward. This round-about journey took eight nights.

They reached the outskirts of Medina just before noon on 27 September 622. It looked like a fortress, for it was surrounded by overlapping buildings; but although these did include fortresses, there were plenty of pathways between the houses.<sup>1</sup> As Slit-Ear pushed into the city, a Jew shouted: "People of Medina! Your good fortune has arrived!" Muslims ran out of their houses to greet their new prophet, shouting, "Allah is greater!" and, "It's Allah's Messenger! He has come, he has come!"

The Muslims from Mecca were lodging as guests in the houses of their new friends in Medina. The Medinan Muslims all competed for the honour of hosting Muhammad and begged him to settle in their houses. Muhammad said that Slit-Ear the camel must choose his new home.

Slit-Ear walked through Medina, ignoring all the people who clamoured around her urging the Prophet to lodge at their house.

When she arrived at the Najjar clan's homes on the eastern edge of the city, she knelt down in a date-drying field. Muhammad remained on her back. After a few minutes, she stood up again, walked off a few steps, then turned round and returned to the field. At the same spot she dropped to her knees exhausted and did not move again. So Muhammad slid off her back and asked how he could buy the field.

Abu Bakr paid,<sup>2</sup> and Muhammad said that they must build a mosque (temple) for Allah. It would not just be their worship-place, but also the court of justice, the political centre, the community hub and Muhammad's home. All the Muslims shared this effort, chanting as they worked:

*If we had sat while the Prophet worked,  
you could have said that we had shirked.*

*The afterlife is the one life true.*

*Bless the Comrades and Immigrants too!*

They baked heavy clay bricks that could only be carried one at a time; but they forced Ammar, a large man of low status, to carry them in pairs. He did not dare disobey the higher-class Muslims to their faces but he complained to Muhammad: "They're killing me. They load me with burdens that they can't carry themselves."

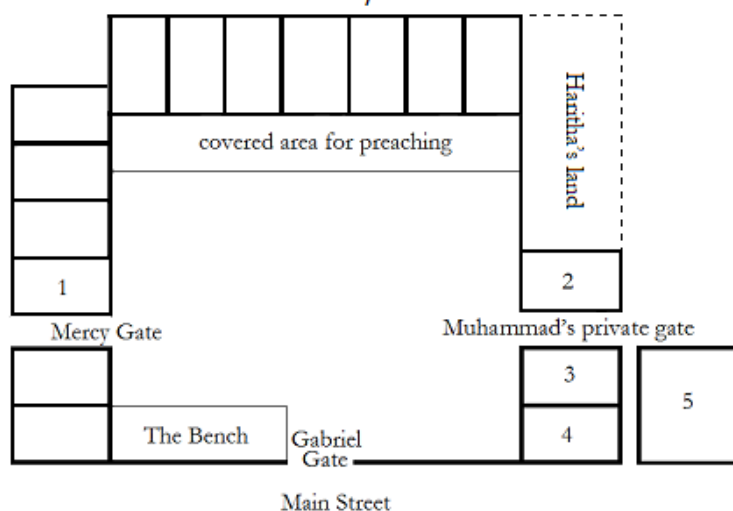
Muhammad soothed him and wiped the dust off his forehead. Ammar began to chant his own rhyme.

*There's one who labours night and day  
to build a mosque from bricks of clay  
and one whose dust is blown away!*

He sang it until another Muslim threatened to punch his nose, and once again, Muhammad stood up for Ammar.

Despite these squabbles, the Muslims built a two-metre wall around a courtyard about 30 metres (33 yards) square. Over the north end they made a roof of unthatched palm-branches to shelter the preaching area. The rest was open to the sky.

### *The Mosque in 623*



- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1 Abu Bakr's house | 4 Aïsha's house |
| 2 Haritha's house  | 5 Uthman &      |
| 3 Saowda's house   | Ruqayya's house |

The land along the east wall belonged to a Muslim named Haritha. Muhammad bought off him enough space to build thatched huts for his wife and daughters. There was no separate room for Muhammad, beyond the fact that the whole mosque was regarded as his house. As his family grew, he bought up more and more of Haritha's land, and Haritha moved his house further and further north, until in the end Haritha's own house was right off the mosque wall. Abu Bakr built himself a house in the west wall, and Muhammad allotted space in the walls and surrounding fields for all the Meccan Muslims to build their houses.<sup>3</sup>

In this new village, Muhammad was the chief. Islam was no longer a marginalised sect but the default norm. Five times a day the gaunt black Bilal called, "*Allah is greater! Come to prayer!*" to summon the Muslims to prostration. At his call, hundreds of people gathered in the mosque. At the Friday midday prayers Muhammad also announced Allah's latest prophecies or preached a sermon on how Muslims should live their lives.

### Muhammad's First Sermon in Medina

Allah has the right to be praised. I praise Him and beg His help.

O people, do good works! You know that you might die at any time and leave your flock without a shepherd. Then Allah will say to you, "Didn't My Messenger come to you with a message? Didn't I give you wealth and show you favour? What good works have you done?"

Perhaps you will look to right and left and see nothing; you will look in front of you and see only Hell.

You can protect yourself from Hellfire by giving away even half a date, so do so. If you don't have as much as a date, speak a good word. Each good deed will be rewarded ten times over or even 1,400 times.

Peace be upon you and Allah's mercy and blessing.<sup>4</sup>

Friday was not exactly a Sabbath. Allah had not become tired after six days of creating the world so He had not needed to rest, and nor did He require a rest-day from His people. It was compulsory for every Muslim man who had passed puberty to abandon trade or sport to attend Friday midday prayers, but he could return to everyday activities as soon as prayers were over.

Some people arrived at Friday worship fresh from the dirt of the fields. Muhammad had to teach his flock about the due respect required to Allah. "Muslims! Allah has made Friday a festival day. So don't turn up for prayers drunk or even dirty. It's compulsory to take a bath, clean your teeth and put on perfume if you have any. Wash yourselves with clean sand if you can't find any water."

One of the first new prophecies was about prophecy itself.

*Whatever communications We abrogate or cause to be forgotten,  
We bring one better than it or like it. Do you not know that  
Allah has power over all things?*<sup>5</sup>

Muhammad was preparing the Muslims for change. They could expect new rules for their new circumstances. If a new rule contradicted an old one, then the old one had been cancelled (“abrogated”) and could be forgotten.<sup>6</sup>

The Meccan Muslims found their new neighbours very generous toward them and very eager to learn about Islam. However, the Muslims always kept a firm distinction between the old converts from Mecca, proudly known as Immigrants, and the new converts from Medina, called Comrades. The Comrades were never regarded as quite as important as Muhammad’s original supporters from Mecca.

Among the Immigrants there was also a hierarchy. Humble Muslims who had suffered in the persecution – people like Ammar, Khabbab, Ibn Masud and al-Nahdiya – lost their importance now that the persecution was over. They settled happily; they were respected for their spiritual superiority; but they were not leaders or influencers in the new community. Most of their names faded out of the story. Even Bilal, who was in the public eye as the prayer-caller, had no political status. It was the rich merchants and the blood-relations of Muhammad who became his middle management.<sup>7</sup>

After Muhammad’s flight from Mecca, the Meccans did no harm to any member of his family. Within weeks, it was safe to send Zayd back to Mecca to bring them to Medina. Only his eldest daughter Zaynab remained in Mecca with her polytheist husband.

Fatima was now seventeen, and both Abu Bakr and Umar asked for her hand in marriage. Muhammad told each suitor, “Wait until I decide.” The two friends compared notes and agreed that they had been rejected.

Muhammad had already suggested that his cousin Ali might like to marry her, and the family now urged Ali to confirm his intentions. Even Saad Nabit, high chief of the Wolves, involved himself. “It’s for your sake that Muhammad is refusing her other suitors.”

Ali did not believe it. "I don't have any money; and I'm not a prospective convert who might be bribed by her."

"You are the best person to be her husband," Saad insisted. "Be direct and propose!"

Ali was direct. He walked into the house and said, "I have come to Allah and His Messenger to ask to marry Fatima."

"Welcome," said Muhammad. And that was all.

"You're married, Ali," said Saad Nabit. "The deed is done, for he never lies."

Muhammad told Fatima, "Ali has expressed interest in you."

Fatima was silent. Since a modest maiden's silence was her consent, Muhammad did not detect any reluctance. Later, when she realised that her father really had given her to Ali, she burst into tears.

"Why are you crying?" asked Muhammad. He thought she was upset because she could expect a life of poverty. "I haven't deprived you. I've found you the man I like best in the world. Ali is blessed on earth and righteous in Heaven!"

Fatima was not thinking about money. "Father, you've married me off to a short man with bleary eyes and a big belly!"

She had many months to resign herself to her fate, for Ali could not afford to support a family. They could not live together until his fortunes improved.<sup>8</sup>

Long before the mosque was completed, Muhammad's two main problems were obvious. The first was that the Comrades were still a minority in Medina. Most of the polytheists and almost all the Jews were neutral toward Muhammad. They had no reason to declare war on Mecca. In fact, Mecca and Medina were such old allies that many people in Medina were asking why they should even protect Muhammad. Was it worth offending their allies just to save the life of one trouble-maker?

## **The Politics of Medina**

### **The Jews**

There were about 5,000 Jews in Medina. They had settled there about 500 years earlier and they had built up an economy based on agriculture.

The Jews were on good terms with one another. They were indirectly involved in the quarrels between the polytheists whenever they had to assist an ally. The Qaynuqa were allies of the Lions, and the Nadir and Qurayza were allies of the Wolves.

### **The Polytheists**

There were about 8,000 polytheists. They had arrived in Medina from Yemen about 300 years after the Jews.

They had divided into two tribes, the Khazraj ("Lions") and the Aows ("Wolves"). For 120 years these two tribes had been bitter rivals who fought like cat and dog. A day of full-scale war had erupted six times, most recently in 617. There were also petty fights as each clan fought to control the best land.

### **The Coming of Islam**

After Muhammad arrived, several hundred polytheists converted to Islam. The Lions and Wolves buried their differences and transferred their new loyalty to Muhammad.

The Jews were critical of Muhammad because they did not believe he was a prophet. Abdallah, chief of the Aowf clan and high chief of the whole Lion tribe, was also sceptical.

As time passed, more and more people joined Muhammad. By 627 there were almost no Jews left in Medina, and all the polytheists had converted. The whole city was Islamic.<sup>9</sup>

The most powerful nobleman in Medina was Abdallah, chief of the Aowf clan and high chief of the whole Lion tribe. He was also popular with the Wolf tribe and the Jews; the people had been on the point of crowning him King of Medina when Muhammad arrived. He soon received a letter from the Quraysh elders.

You are protecting Muhammad. You must fight him or expel him. Otherwise we swear that we shall come to you with our whole army until we kill your men and take over your women.

Abdallah Aowf took counsel with his allies to consider whether it was practical to fight Muhammad. Muhammad fearlessly visited Abdallah's house and warned him: "The Quraysh won't need to fight you now. If you fight me, you'll end up fighting your own sons and brothers. Is this what you want?"

Abdallah dropped his plot when he understood how many people within the walls of Medina were willing to fight for Muhammad. Muslims were a minority; but they were nevertheless such a large minority that it was no longer feasible for Abdallah's supporters to crown him. He was disappointed, but he did not suggest that anyone should start a new war over who should be the leader.

Muhammad decided that Abdallah Aowf's neutrality was not good enough. He barged into his rival's garden, recited the Quraan to him and urged him to become a Muslim. Abdallah listened until Muhammad had finished. Then he said: "Your story sounds very fine, but it isn't true! So save your preaching for people who approach you; don't invade other people's privacy with talk that they don't want to hear."<sup>10</sup>

Muhammad saw that he was not going to take control of Medina as quickly as he had hoped. In the meantime, the Muslims, Jews and polytheists would need a formal agreement over how they would all live together. So he sat down with their chiefs and they drew up a contract that was applied to the whole city.



### **The Compact of Medina**

1. All citizens of Medina are allies.
2. People of Medina help each other against enemies from outside.
3. Nobody in Medina shows friendship to the Quraysh.
4. Each tribe and family pays for its own expenses.
5. Freedom of religion is guaranteed to everyone.
6. Unresolved disputes are referred to Muhammad.
7. This compact cannot be used as an excuse to protect criminals from the consequences of their crimes.<sup>11</sup>

This compact was clever. The clause about “unresolved disputes” probably only meant that Muhammad would be the chief among the Muslims;\* but it also meant that the other chiefs had recognised his formal status in Medina as one of the chiefs. Muhammad had in fact earned this status by persuading the rival chiefs to stop fighting and agree about something. What they agreed about was that the Quraysh were a frightening enemy against whom they would soon go to war – a plausible conclusion in the light of their threatening letter.

Muhammad had even less success with the Jews than with the polytheists. Since he claimed to be their Prophet, he needed the Jews to ratify his claims. They were willing to give him a fair hearing. Only a day or two after his arrival, Huayy, chief of the Jewish tribe of Nadir, came to his lodging to question him. They

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\* One of the problems with this compact is that the original (if it was even in writing) has not survived. So we only know what the Muslims wrote about it decades later. It is very unlikely that the Jews agreed to refer their disputes to a non-Jew; it is doubtful that the polytheists would have referred them to a stranger; but it is highly likely that the Muslims, whether Comrade or Immigrant, agreed to refer everything to Muhammad.

talked together all day.

Perhaps Muhammad was surprised at how sceptical Huayy was of his claims; but the more he spoke, the more Huayy realised that Muhammad, far from being the Messiah,\* knew nothing at all about the God of the Jews. Huayy also recognised that Muhammad was very ambitious and that he would not give up his claims easily. He concluded that Muhammad was a false prophet, and he advised his family: “We must oppose him as long as we live.”

Muhammad was surprised and disappointed to see that hardly any Jews converted to Islam. This damaged his credibility as a prophet foretold in the Torah. He worked for several months on trying to win their support. He visited their schools and presented his claims. He tried to make Islam look attractive while at the same time warning them of Allah’s judgment and Hellfire. He told them that he followed the religion of Abraham and that they would soon find that he was the Prophet foretold in their Torah.

Of course he had not read the Torah, and his vague memories of Bible stories were no match for the Jewish scholars who knew their scriptures by heart. In fact he could not answer the simplest questions.

When he was asked to name the Ten Plagues of Egypt, he recited the Ten Commandments instead, although he could only recall six of them. Later he was able to remember five of the Plagues; he invented four more and concluded that there had only been nine in total.

“We submit to Allah,” he said. “We don’t discriminate among any

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\* Strangely, Muhammad never used the word *Messiah* about himself; he said that Jesus had been the Messiah. This was probably because he did not understand the Hebrew word *Moshiach*, just as many English-speakers do not understand the Greek word *Christos*. Both mean “the Chosen One” and are not a personal name but a title. Muhammad claimed to be “the Prophet foretold in the Torah,” apparently without realising that this Prophet was the Messiah and that the prophecies to which he was appealing were messianic.

of the prophets. We believe in all of them—Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, his sons, Moses, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon, David and all the rest.”

The Jews interrupted, “Then you can’t be a prophet! We do not believe in Jesus or in anyone who believes in Him; and Solomon was nothing but a sorcerer.”

Since Solomon and Jesus were already characters in the Quraan, Muhammad could not retract them. He protested: “Solomon did not disbelieve, but the demons disbelieved. Allah requires you by the word of Moses in the Torah to hold Jesus true.”

With errors like these, the Jews did not take long to reject Muhammad’s message. At the same time, Muhammad was so certain that his identity as their Prophet was obvious that he assumed that the Jews must secretly know it. He accused them of only pretending to disbelieve him because they resented him – just as the Children of Israel had disbelieved Moses. Their questions confused him, “so that truth and falsehood were confounded.” Whenever he did not know an answer, he accused them of hatred and malice.

The Comrades tried to support their Prophet. They reminded the Jews, “You told us a prophet was coming, and now he is here.”

The Jews replied, “Muhammad is not the one we told you about. He has not brought us anything we recognise.”

They said that he could not be the Messiah because he was an Arab. Since this was the one argument that Muhammad understood, he concluded that this was the *main* reason why they did not believe in him: they must have hoped for a Prophet who was a Jew like themselves. Yet he was quite unable to explain from the Torah why an Arab Prophet should be expected.

*Evil is that for which they have sold their souls –  
that they should deny what Allah has revealed,  
out of envy that Allah should send down of His grace*

*on whomsoever of His servants He pleases;  
so they have made themselves deserving of wrath upon wrath,  
and there is a disgraceful punishment for the unbelievers.<sup>12</sup>*

Prophets were supposed to prophesy. A few of Muhammad's new disciples believed that every word out of his mouth must be prophecy. When he told some of the Comrades that there was no need to fertilise female date-palms artificially, the trusting Comrades stopped grafting and left their orchards to nature. Harvest time came, and the date-crop was ruined.

Muhammad tried to say that he had only given his opinion and had not meant his words as a prophecy from Allah. Nevertheless, his friends had clearly understood it as a prophecy, and he had not made any effort to tell them otherwise at the time. The failed prophecy gave the Jews one more reason why Muhammad could not be the Messiah.

They challenged him to perform a miracle. Could he make a river spring up out of the earth? Could Allah speak with an audible voice?

Muhammad said that the Quraan was his miracle. "Nobody could ever produce a collection like the Quraan, not even if *jinn* helped him!"

The Jews countered they could easily produce a book like the Quraan; it was up to Muhammad to produce a collection that they recognised as consistent with their Tanakh.

That was the real problem: not that Muhammad was an Arab or that he sometimes made mistakes with the details or that he could not do miracles, but his complete lack of any kind of overview of the Tanakh's message. One rabbi tried to explain about this. "Pay attention, Muhammad, so that we can make you understand."

The rabbi's explanation of his scriptures was so contrary to what the Quraan said that Muhammad accused him of attacking and reviling Islam.

When he finally grasped that there were very significant differences between the Quraan and the Jewish holy book, his reaction was to accuse the rabbis of changing what was written in their Torah. He said they had deliberately hidden the relevant passages, twisted their tongues, deceived their congregations and made error attractive to people.

*Woe, then, to those who write the book with their hands  
and then say: "This is from Allah,"  
so that they may take for it a small price;  
therefore woe to them for what their hands have written  
and woe to them for what they earn.<sup>13</sup>*

He might have convinced the Muslims that the Jews were deceivers; but of course the Jews themselves knew that they had not deceived anyone, so Muhammad's false assertion only confirmed their view that *he* was the deceiver.

He resorted to producing prophecies against them. He threatened that Allah would turn Kaab Qurayza's face back-to front and repeated his threats of Hellfire.

*There is a disease in their hearts,  
so Allah added to their disease  
and they shall have a painful chastisement because they lie.<sup>14</sup>*

*... Allah is not at all heedless of what you do.  
These are they who buy the life of this world for the hereafter,  
so their chastisement shall not be lightened  
nor shall they be helped.<sup>15</sup>*

The Jews ignored his threats. One rabbi advised him: "You cannot frighten us, Muhammad. We are the sons and the beloved of God."

When they ran out of serious arguments, the Jews teased him with silly questions. "When will the world end? If Allah created everything, who created Allah? What shape is His arm?" Muhammad flushed crimson and rushed at the questioners with un-Prophet-like rage.<sup>16</sup>

Quite aside from religion or politics, Muhammad's second great problem was how the Immigrants would support themselves in Medina. Men like Abu Bakr and Umar, who had brought their money with them, were able to return to trade quickly. The enterprising Abdalrahman was very successful in selling butter and dried yoghurt at the Qaynuqa Bazaar. When Muhammad's son-in-law Uthman bought dates from the Jews and sold them at a profit, the Prophet even had to warn him not to over-charge. People who had been tanners were able to buy hides and make leather.

However, people who had no money could not invest in trade. Some of them had always been poor. Others had only possessed shares in the wealth of their families or business partners; leaving their families had meant leaving their wealth. What was worse, their old skills were not suited to the new culture, for Medina was a farming community; since nothing grew in Mecca, the Immigrants had no experience of farming. So they could only undertake the most basic labour. That winter Ali was so hungry that he drew sixteen buckets of water for a neighbouring farmer, who paid him one date per bucket. He ate a handful and then took the rest to share with Muhammad. Some of the Comrades leased out sections of their farms in exchange for half the produce so that the Immigrants could work on them and take the other half.

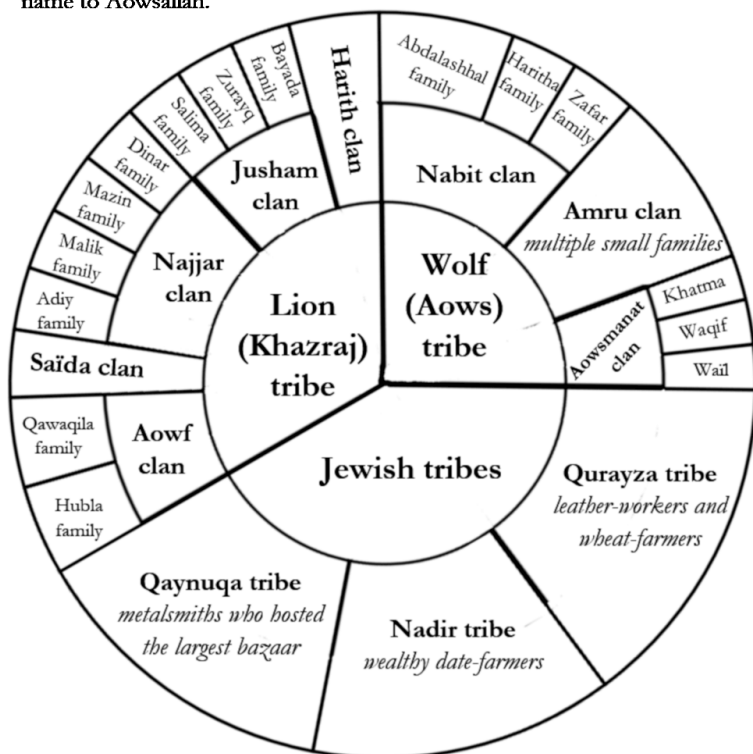
Some of the Immigrants never found permanent work. Thirty men with no money or family slept in the mosque courtyard under a roofed platform called The Bench and begged for their food by day. Sometimes they tied stones to their stomachs to relieve the hunger-pangs. Muhammad once tied his own stomach to two stones. One famished beggar was found in a faint right outside Muhammad's front door. It was clear that it would be many months before the Immigrants were a solvent community.<sup>17</sup>

At about this time Muhammad lost a key ally. Asad, chief of the Najjar clan, caught diphtheria. Muhammad, who fancied himself as a folk-physician, ordered his lesions to be burned with red-hot metal, but it did not help. Asad died.

## The People of Medina

Unlike Mecca, Medina did not have one dominant tribe. Three different groups lived together. Each group had its own leaders, middle classes, labourers and slaves. Each tribe was divided into clans, most of which had sub-clans. Disputes between the clans created most of the politics of Medina.

After Muhammad became dominant in 627, the Aowallah clan changed its name to Aowsallah.



This misfortune turned out well for Muhammad, for Asad had not left any sons. The Najjar clan came to him, saying: “Our leader has died, so appoint a new leader over us.” Muhammad at once appointed himself. Much to the delight of the loyal Najjar clan, they now had a prophet as their chief; and the Prophet’s status as one of the chiefs of Medina became official.

Like any good chief, Muhammad brought Asad’s mother, aunt and three young daughters to live in the mosque alongside his own

womenfolk. This not only ensured they would have male protection but also demonstrated to the public that Muhammad was now the head of their clan. He consolidated his position by proposing marriage to Asad's young sister-in-law, Habiba.<sup>18</sup>

Muhammad's few days of bonding with the Najjar clan worried Abu Bakr. He did not want to be pushed out of Muhammad's inner circle by these new allies. So he approached his friend and asked, "Wouldn't you like to consummate your marriage with my daughter Aïsha now?"

"Unfortunately," Muhammad confessed, "I have no money to pay the dower."

"I'll provide that," said Abu Bakr. So the deal was struck.

The date was probably 16 April 623. Aïsha, who was still only nine years old, was playing on a swing. Her mother called her indoors and delivered her to her new house in the opposite wall of the mosque. When Comrade women greeted her at the door, wishing her, "Blessings and good luck!" Aïsha realised that this must be her wedding day. The women washed and perfumed her, combed her hair and dressed her up in a red-striped gown and veil. She was still surprised when her bridegroom walked in: she had not known it would be Muhammad. The women glided out of the house, for no feast or party had been planned. Yet Aïsha was not afraid when she found herself alone with Muhammad, who took her in his arms and consummated the marriage.<sup>19</sup>

Abu Bakr need not have worried: the marriage to Habiba Najjar never took place. The Comrades were very jealous for their daughters' happiness and they disapproved of polygamy. Muhammad could not risk alienating the Najjar clan, so he withdrew his proposal. "I would like to marry Comrade women," he said, "but I hate their pride." He was never to marry any Comrade woman; but he remained chief of the Najjar.<sup>20</sup>

As for Aïsha, it was said that she had a similar personality to



Khadija; perhaps that was why she remained Muhammad's favourite wife. She was certainly strong-willed and very intelligent; though, unlike Khadija, Aisha had a fiery temper.

Aisha never thought it was inappropriate that she had been married at nine, even though she had not started to menstruate and could not cook. She brought her dolls into her new home and played with them for years afterwards. Muhammad kept her entertained. They ran races, rode camels, went out to dinner, watched dancers and spear-throwing displays; and he encouraged the local girls to play at her house. Long after Muhammad's death, she was to say, "None of his wives was more fortunate than I was!"<sup>21</sup>

Their lifestyle was simple. "Beware," said Muhammad, "of sitting with the wealthy!" Aisha's hut was built of mud-bricks with a palm-frond roof; indoor walls of palm branches divided it into rooms. There were no indoor toilets, for, as Aisha said, "We loathe and detest them." They had no lamp and no spare oil for burning in one. There was only one coarse blanket on their bed. They did not buy new clothes if they had old ones that they could mend. Muhammad patched his own sandals and milked their goats himself. They rarely ate meat; they did not even eat barley bread for more than three days in a row, and sometimes they had nothing but dates for a month on end.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, they were generous in charity. Muhammad taught: "The poor will enter Heaven forty years before the rich. Do not turn away a poor man, even if all you can give is half a date. If you love the poor and bring them near you, Allah will bring you near Him on Judgment Day."

Muhammad's wives and daughters distributed food to the people on The Bench every day. Aisha once gave away her only loaf of bread. Another time she gave her last date to a widow, who broke it in half for her two young children. When Muhammad slaughtered a goat one day, Aisha shared it out among so many poor people that all she had left for the family was one shoulder.

Muhammad said that the shoulder was the only part of the goat that she had *not* kept because Allah had given her credits for all she had given away. If a beggar was ever refused food, it was only because the larders of Muhammad's family were exhausted.<sup>23</sup>

Muhammad never accepted charity for himself but he did accept anything labelled as a gift. Nearly every day Saad Saïda, a rich Lion chief, sent a large bowl of milk or butter or meat stew. Each afternoon Muhammad visited his wives one by one, taking the bowl with him, and each wife helped herself from Saad Saïda's bowl. Saad Nabit and others also sent food gifts. Later it was just a courtesy; but in the first year or two, these gifts may have saved them from starvation.<sup>24</sup>

Now that Muhammad was the village chief, he could indulge his obsession with making a ritual out of every action and a rule for every situation. His *sharia*, which means "way", became Allah's laws that shaped the lifestyle of every Muslim. He was always talking about what was *halal* (allowed), *haram* (forbidden) or *fard* (compulsory). Some of his laws confirmed existing Arab customs; others abolished them; and others were new. The process of shaping the *sharia* continued until he died.<sup>25</sup>

### Summary

- Muhammad settled in Medina. His new neighbours included Jews, polytheists, the new converts to Islam ("Comrades") and his Muslim friends from Mecca ("Immigrants"). The Comrades and Immigrants regarded him as their chief.
- He built a mosque, which was his home, his teaching centre and the base of his political operations. His lifestyle there was modest, and he was generous in charity to the poor.
- He signed a compact of cooperation with the Jews and polytheists.
- He debated with the Jews of Medina but failed to convince

them that he was their long-foretold Prophet.

- The Quraysh did not make any attempt to fight him, so he tried to fight them.
- He married Aïsha, the daughter of Abu Bakr, who was only nine. He was to acquire several additional wives in the future, but Aïsha remained his favourite.

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#### References and Notes to *Chapter 7: The Flight to Medina*

1 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 224-227. Waqidi (Faizer) 220. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:264, 266, 271. Bukhari 5:58:245. Tabari (Watt/McDonald) 6:145-150, 162.

2 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 218, 227-228. Ibn Saad (Haq) 271, 273. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:19-20. Bukhari 5:58:245.

3 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 228-229. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 730 #282. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:281-282; 2:283-284; (Bewley) 3:36-37, 133, 183-184, 192-193, 209, 383; 8:119-121. Bukhari 1:10:576; 1:8:438; 4:52:67; 5:58:245. Margoliouth (1905) 221.

4 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 231.

5 Q2:106 (Shakir).

6 Q4:43; 50:38; 62:9-11. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 143-144, 234-236. Malik 2:115. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:290-292; (Bewley) 3:37, 178. Muslim 4:1841. Nasai 2:14:1372. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q2:106. *See also* Wahidi (Guezzou) on Q2:106: Muhammad had already been criticised for changing the rules before he produced this prophecy to the effect that Allah approved all the changes.

7 Q59:9. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 199-201, 228-229, 235-236. Waqidi (Faizer) 185-186. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:116-117, 126, 192-193; 8:177. Bukhari 3:34:264; 7:69:515. Muslim 3:649; 19:4375. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 2:185-186, 188-189; 4:462.

8 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 222, 227. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 162-165. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:13-14, 44-45, 121. Bukhari 7:62:67, 68. Tabari (Landau-Tasserion) 39:172.

9 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 59, 128, 197-201, 228, 230, 239-240, 242, 245, 253, 255, 261, 264-265, 270, 278-279, 363-364, 384, 386, 437-438, 442, 453, 464-466, 482, 519-520. Waqidi (Faizer) 88-89, 180-184, 216, 250, 254, 256-257. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:32, 92; (Bewley) 3:328-329, 470-471, 473-476; 8:248. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:31. Bukhari 5:58:121, 267. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:87. Watt (1956) 156-170. Watt (1960-2007). The name of one tribe, *Aows*, could equally well be translated “gift” (i.e., of the gods) or “wolf”; either translation would fit the context.

10 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 239-241, 277-279, 327-336, 363. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 44. Waqidi (Faizer) 256. Bukhari 6:60:89; 8:73:226. Abu Dawud 19:2998. Lecker (2007-date) “‘Abdallah b. Ubayy.” Lecker (2007-date) “‘Abdallah b. Ubayy.” In the last war, the former Lion high chief had murdered some Jewish hostages. Most of these were from the Nadir tribe; their Qurayza allies had escaped lightly. One reason why Abdallah Aowf was popular was that he had disobeyed his high chief (who was soon afterwards killed in the battle) by refusing to murder those of the hostages who were lodging in his house. Only 8% of the Lions and Wolves were willing to fight at the Robbery at Badr. The total number of Jews who converted to Islam might have been as few as seven.

11 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 231-233. Waqidi (Faizer) 87, 222. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:32. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:33. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:85.

12 Q2:90 (Shakir).

13 Q2:79 (Shakir).

14 Q2:10 (Shakir).

15 Q2:86 (Shakir).

16 Q6:84-85; 17:101; 19:34-40; 27:15-44; 34:12-14; 38:30-40, 42:13; 43:63-64. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 239-247, 251, 254-270, 281. Waqidi (Faizer) 179. Bukhari 5:58:277. Muslim 30:5830, 5831, 5832. Tirmidhi 5:40:2733; 6:44:3144. *Cf* Exodus 7:14-12:36.

17 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 134, 179, 217, 225, 228, 230, 438, 454, 465, 655. Ibn Hanbal (Khattab) 1#444; 1#687; 1#1135. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:300-302; (Bewley) 3:174. Bukhari 1:10:576; 3:47:799; 5:58:126; 7:62:10. Muslim 19:4375. Tirmidhi 4:10:2371; 4:11:2477. Tirmidhi, *Shamail* 9:71; 50:353. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 3:123-124. Guillaume (1960) 43-44. *See also* Winder, R. (1960-2007).

18 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 235. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:473, 475-476; 8:288-289. For Muhammad's medical pretensions, *see* Malik book 50. *See also* Bukhari book 71 (especially #590); Abu Dawud 12:2302; Tirmidhi book 28.

19 Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 792 #918. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:43-44. Bukhari 7:62:88, 90. Muslim 8:3309, 3310, 3311. Abu Dawud 41:4915, 4917. Ibn Maja 3:9:1876, 1877. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:8; (Poonawala) 9:130-131; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:172-173.

20 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 346. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:108-109, 144, 288-289. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 4:424.

21 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 490, 496, 535-536. Malik 16:16:57. Waqidi (Faizer) 209. Ibn Hanbal (Cairo) 6#24908. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:481; (Bewley) 5:21; 8:44, 46-47, 49-50, 54-56, 81, 89-90, 124-126, 131, 186-187. Bukhari 2:15:70, 72; 2:23:386; 58:165, 166; 3:47:755; 3:48:805, 829; 4:55:623; 5:57:113, 114; 5:59:462, 464; 6:60:213, 274, 281, 311; 7:62:119, 155; 7:65:329, 330, 339; 8:73:98, 151. Bukhari, *Mufrod* 7:79:142; 15:311; 52:616:1274; 84:162. Muslim 4:1139, 1940, 2127; 8:3311, 3453, 3454; 19:4351; 23:5054; 31:5972, 5976, 5977, 5981, 5984; 32:6274, 6275, 6285; 37:6673; 39:6759. Abu Dawud 23:3561; 41:4790, 4914, 4981. Nasai 3:21:2039; 4:27:3466. Nasai, *Kubra* 16 #8917. Tirmidhi 2:6:1109 (*c/f* Bukhari 8:73:151 *with* Abu Dawud 42:4914); 6:46:3691. Ibn Maja 3:9:1981, 1982. Tabari (Smith) 14:101-102; (Brockett) 16:39, 52, 69-70, 73, 76, 121-122, 124, 126-127, 129-130, 132, 135, 136, 138-139, 149-150, 152-153, 156-157, 164, 171; (Morony) 18:127, 153. Ghazali (Farah) 2:95. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 2:91. Suyuti (Jarrett) 162, 166, 176.

22 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 494, 495. Ibn Hanbal (Cairo) 6 #25867. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:282, 429, 593-595; (Bewley) 8:53, 121. Bukhari 1:9:492. Bukhari, *Mufrod* 29:247:538, 539, 540, 541. Muslim 37:6673; 42:7085, 7083, 7086, 7084, 7087, 7089, 7092, 7093, 7097, 7098. Tabari (Friedman) 12:205-206; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:172-173. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 2:208.

23 Malik 38:12. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:300-302; (Bewley) 8:42, 74, 91. Malik 38:12; 58:1:5. Ibn Hanbal (Cairo) 6#24780, #24961. Bukhari 1:10:576; 8:73:24. Muslim 5:2349; 6:2461; 9:3602; 32:6362. Abu Dawud 9:1696; 12:2208; 41:5022. Tirmidhi 4:36:2352; 4:37:2470. Dhahabi 2 #131. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 4:475.

24 Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:478; 8:118-119. Bukhari 3:47:750. Muslim 5:2353, 2357.

25 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 235, 675. Malik 20:231; 28:38; 31:87. Bukhari 1:4:243; 2:22:311; 2:25:588; 7:63:253. Muslim 3:679; 10:3633. Nasai 2:14:1372; 5:44:4459. Tirmidhi 1:2:421. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:9.

## *The Great Robbery at Badr*

**April 623 – March 624**

Muhammad's relationship with the Jews was deteriorating rapidly. His financial problems told against him. He was always asking for money. Huayy Nadir and his friends went around to the Lions and Wolves, advising them not to contribute to public expenses, "for you'll end up losing your money. And you don't know where that money is going."

Muhammad tried to set up a customs-free bazaar, in direct competition to the authorised markets and in blatant defiance of Medina's established rules. The Jewish leader Kaab Nadir demanded that Muhammad obey the same rules as everyone else: he marched into the bazaar-tent and cut its ropes.

Abu Bakr and a rabbi named Phineas came to Muhammad complaining of each other. The rabbi said that Abu Bakr had slapped his face and threatened to cut off his head.

Abu Bakr said that Phineas had deserved it. "He blasphemed! He alleged that Allah was poorer than the Jews. He said, 'We do not need Allah, but He needs us because He keeps asking us to lend Him money.'"

Phineas denied that he had said this. Muhammad settled the quarrel by producing a revelation from Allah confirming that Phineas *had* said it and that he would go to Hell.

This might have convinced the Muslims; but the Jews naturally believed Phineas's side of the story, and it confirmed their opinion that "Allah" was Muhammad's convenient puppet.

In the Qaynuqa market, a fight broke out between Umar and a Jew.

Three criminal cases arose in the Jewish community. In each case, someone exploited the clause in the Compact of Medina that

allowed unresolved conflicts to be referred to Muhammad. In each case, Muhammad made them wish they had not bothered.

A Jew from the Qurayza tribe killed a Nadirite. The Nadir tribe always paid blood-money to the Qurayza at a half-rate; so now the Qurayza said that they only wanted to pay half too. They appealed to Muhammad.

Kaab, chief of the Qurayza, tested Muhammad with bribery. "If I become a Muslim, all the rest of the Jews will follow me. So if I become a Muslim, will you judge this case in my favour?"

Muhammad recognised this crude trap and refused the bribe. He judged against the Qurayza and made them pay the whole blood-price.

Muhammad did not realise that he had fallen into a different trap. The unequal punishments were not random; they had been instituted because the Qurayza owed lives to the Nadir, probably as a left-over from the last war. The inequity would cease when all the life-debts were paid. By not making any inquiries about this, Muhammad showed that he did not care about the Jews' history or the deeper nature of justice. Even when they queried his decision, he expressed surprise that they would want the kind of justice that was rooted in the bad old days before Muhammad had arrived to set things right.

It happened again, this time because a Nadirite killed a Qurazite. The Qurayza were not allowed to demand capital punishment from the Nadir (again, because of the situation with life-debts); so when they put it to the test by demanding that this particular man must be killed anyway, the Nadir appealed to Muhammad. Muhammad ruled "a life for a life," and the Nadirite was executed.

Then came an appeal from a Jewish couple who had committed adultery. The Jews of Medina punished adultery by flogging the guilty pair then blackening their faces and parading them around town mounted backward on donkeys. Muhammad asked the

Jewish rabbis how the Torah said adultery should be punished, and they tried to evade the question.

“Woe to you Jews!” Muhammad exclaimed. “Why have you abandoned Allah’s judgment? I shall revive Allah’s order and His book. They shall be stoned!”

The culprits were dragged out to the gate of the mosque, where the Muslims stoned them. Umar’s young son proudly remembered that he threw some of the stones. When the guilty man felt the first rock, he crouched over the woman to shield her until both of them were killed.<sup>1</sup>

Huayy was a ringleader in the Jews’ efforts to extinguish Islam by turning other people away from it. Their certainty that Muhammad was not a prophet was affecting the Comrades. Several of the Lions and Wolves now admitted that they still believed in the old Arabian gods and regretted that they had been so quick to accept Muhammad’s political leadership.

These secret polytheists used to gather in the mosque with everyone else, but they would huddle together, laughing and whispering over Muhammad’s preaching. One day he ordered them to be thrown out. With shouts of “Filth!” and “Agent of Satan!” and “You’ll go to Hell!” the Muslims grabbed their hair and beards, slapped and punched them and dragged them along the floor.

Nobody dared to attack Abdallah Aowf, but of course his stubborn polytheism made him the centre of the unbelievers.

Muhammad warned the Comrades not to be too friendly with their old Jewish allies.

*Do not take for intimate friends  
from among others than your own people;  
they do not fall short of inflicting loss upon you;  
they love what distresses you;  
vehement hatred has already appeared from out of their mouths,*

*and what their breasts conceal is greater still ...*<sup>2</sup>

A group of Comrades remembered some old grudges between Lions and Wolves and began a fight in the streets. Muhammad calmed it down. He blamed a Jew for “stirring it up” out of fear that the united Comrades would attack the Jews, even though the Jew whom he accused turned out not to have been present.<sup>3</sup>

Muhammad had a compact not to fight the Jews; but he had a command from Allah to fight against the Quraysh. The two conflicts, verbal and military, occurred at the same time.

After their blustering letter to Abdallah Aowf was ignored, the Quraysh realised that nobody in Medina was going to hand Muhammad over to them. Since they did not really want to fight their friends in Medina, they did not carry out their threat of war. They waited for seven months doing ... absolutely nothing. By the time Muhammad married Aïsha, he knew that if he wanted to fight the Quraysh, he would have to start the war himself.

He heard that Mr Stupid was bringing a camel-caravan home from Syria to Mecca, so he sent his Uncle Hamza with thirty men to attack the merchants and steal the goods. Hamza arrived to find that the merchants were all armed and that he was outnumbered ten to one. Fortunately a local chief from the area acted as an intermediary and persuaded the two groups not to fight each other.

The elder Abu Sufyan also brought a caravan to Mecca, so Muhammad sent seventy men to raid them. One of them, Saad Zuhra,\* decided to shoot at the Quraysh. His friends stood shielding him until he had fired all twenty arrows in his quiver, and each arrow had injured either a man or a camel. Yet although the Quraysh outnumbered the raiders three to one, they did not retaliate but instead retreated. The Muslims decided that it would be unwise to pursue them.

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\* Saad Zuhra was the first man in history to shoot an arrow for Islam. See chapter 4 for his other “first”.



A third raid managed to miss the caravan altogether.

In August he heard about another Quraysh caravan, and this time he led the raid in person. But he missed the caravan. Instead he happened upon some people from a clan of the Bakr tribe. The clan, made nervous by all those armed men, were quick to ask for peace. Muhammad made them promise to stop helping the Quraysh (who had been their allies). Now he had neutralised a group that might have created difficulties in his war against Mecca.

Twice more he tried to raid Quraysh caravans; but both times he missed them. The second time he encountered a tribe allied to the Bakr, so he made a compact with them too.

A Quraysh man retaliated by raiding Muhammad's camels in Medina. Ali led a chase after the thief all the way to the oasis of Badr but they could not catch him. However, he was a lone operator; he did not attack again.<sup>4</sup>

In January 624 Muhammad sent eight men to spy on the Quraysh. He did not mention fighting because it was the sacred month of armistice; their brief was only to report on what the Quraysh were doing. On the last day of the sacred month as the spies lay in wait between Ta'if and Mecca, four Quraysh merchants passed.

The spies hesitated. They could not attack in the sacred month; but if they waited until the next day, the merchants would have reached safety in Mecca. Then they made up their minds. They ambushed the merchants while they were cooking and shot a volley of arrows. They killed one\* and captured two more. The fourth man escaped, but the Muslims herded the load of wine, raisins and leather goods back to Medina.

Muhammad put on a great display of being angry. "I did not order you to fight in the sacred month!" He kept everyone in suspense, refusing to help himself to any share of the plunder, letting the

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\* His name was Amru ibn al-Hadrami. He was the first man in history to be killed in an Islamic *jihad*.

spies think they were doomed to die, yet not releasing the two prisoners either. (Umar wanted to behead one of them, while Muhammad worked on converting him to Islam.) He knew that the Quraysh would never forget that he had violated the sacred month to kill, steal and kidnap.

Then Gabriel gave him a new prophecy. It was a major turning-point in Islamic morality. Allah said that the murder of the merchant had been justified because the Quraysh had committed the even worse crime of driving the Muslims out of the Kaaba.

*They ask you concerning the sacred month about fighting in it. Say: Fighting in it is a grave matter, and hindering from Allah's way and denying Him, and the Sacred Mosque and turning its people out of it, are still graver with Allah, and persecution is graver than slaughter.*<sup>5</sup>

Some of the Muslims in Medina found this difficult to believe. Did Allah really allow them to commit murder just to facilitate a theft? Muhammad replied that He did.

*And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits, surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits.*<sup>6</sup>

While Allah did not allow random killing, He specifically ordered attacks on the Quraysh. They deserved it because – unlike random strangers – they had already initiated hostilities. In fact the Muslims were under orders to kill Allah's enemies until the day when Allah might rule the Kaaba.

*Kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out from whence they drove you out, and persecution is severer than slaughter ... And fight with them until there is no persecution, and religion should be only for Allah.*<sup>7</sup>

Those who still had scruples were warned:

*Fighting is enjoined on you, and it is an object of dislike to you; and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you,*

*and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you, and Allah knows, while you do not know.*<sup>8</sup>

Most of the Muslims were satisfied by Muhammad's explanation that the Quraysh had "deserved it" because of their hostility to the Muslims.

Muhammad then accepted 20% of the plunder as his share, together with a word from Allah that Muslims who fought for Allah in the future would be entitled to a share of the takings. The Quraysh redeemed the two prisoners at four times the usual rate; but one of them chose to become a Muslim and remain in Medina. The Muslims did not pay blood-money for the murdered man. Muhammad had Allah's regulations for blood-money committed to writing and he suspended the notice from his sword.<sup>9</sup>

The Jews were very critical of this robbery, saying, "War has come to life!"\* They asked Muhammad which spirit had inspired his prophecies, and he repeated that it was the angel Gabriel. The Jews did not dispute the spirit's name but they denounced his character. He must be "an enemy, an angel who comes only with violence and the shedding of blood."

Finally the Jews declared their position to Muhammad. A delegation of rabbis from all three tribes declared: "We cannot see that the Quraan is arranged as the Torah is. You have not brought us anything we recognise, and God has not sent down to you any sign that we should follow you. We hold by what we have and we live according to its guidance and the truth. We do not believe in you and we will not follow you."

Muhammad produced his usual prophecies about how the Jews would go to Hell. Then he rearranged the mosque. He moved the roofed area where he preached from the north end to the south. Now the direction of bowing down for prayer was no longer

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\* These words, *'amarati'l-harb*, are a pun on *Amru ibn al-Hadrami*, the name of the murdered man.

northward (to Jerusalem) but southward (to Mecca).<sup>10</sup>

He then decreed that the month of Ramadan would a time of fasting. There could be no eating, drinking or sex in daylight hours, although there was no restriction on night-time indulgence.<sup>11</sup>

*The month of Ramadan ... whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast therein, and whoever is sick or upon a journey, then [the same] number of other days ...*<sup>12</sup>

The Jews had become a huge embarrassment. They were also a political risk, for they had friends in Mecca. Before Muhammad could decide what to do about them, he had another opportunity to attack the Quraysh.

Abu Sufyan, the most powerful merchant in Mecca, was on his way home from Syria with a thousand camels and merchandise worth 100,000 gold coins. Every Quraysh down to the poorest had invested in this trade-venture. Since Abu Sufyan had only thirty or forty unarmed men with him, Muhammad summoned the Muslims and said: "We'll go out to attack that caravan. Perhaps Allah will grant us its wealth as booty."

Some of the men obeyed him eagerly. Others hesitated because they had only promised to defend Muhammad in Medina: they had not expected him to leave the city to fight *offensively*. On 7 March 624 Muhammad set out with a company of three flags, two horses, seventy camels and (after he had sent home a handful of inept teenagers) 305 armed men. Three-quarters of these were Comrades who had not fought for Muhammad before.<sup>13</sup>

They searched around the desert for nine days,\* asking everyone they passed about the Quraysh caravan.

One nomad, perhaps surprised that a true prophet did not know where the caravan was, asked: "If Muhammad is really a prophet,

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\* The direct route from Medina to Badr took only three days. The Muslims spent a long time searching the desert for Abu Sufyan.

what's in my camel's belly?"

A Muslim warrior retorted: "Don't question Allah's Messenger! I'll tell you about your camel. You committed bestiality with her and you've begotten a goat!" Muhammad shut him up.

Eventually two scouts brought news that Abu Sufyan was expected in Badr, a fertile market-oasis that hosted seasonal trade-fairs. On the ninth day the Muslims reached the Badr area.

Here Muhammad heard some unwelcome news. Abu Sufyan had found out that the Muslims were tracking his caravan. He had called for the Meccan army to meet them at the frontier and escort them home as an armed guard. The Quraysh had gathered their weapons and marched out of Mecca. They were now advancing to Badr.

"What shall we do?" he asked the Muslims.

Abu Bakr and Umar gave advice. Other Muslims cried, "We'll do whatever you tell us!"

"I'll speak for the Comrades," said Saad Nabit, high chief of the Wolves. "You are the Prophet, and we have promised to obey you. So we will follow you wherever you wish to go. By Allah, even if you walked into the sea, every one of us would plunge into it with you. We are not opposed to meeting your enemy tomorrow, so take us with you with Allah's blessing."

"Then let's go!" said Muhammad. "Allah has promised that we'll meet either Abu Sufyan or the army."<sup>14</sup>

The Muslims entered Badr just after nightfall. Muhammad sent Ali with a few men to the wells to scout for information about the Quraysh. They returned to camp with three Quraysh slaves whom they had captured. They began to beat them, demanding, "Tell us where Abu Sufyan is!"

"We're not with Abu Sufyan!" the slaves pleaded. "We are water-carriers for the Quraysh army!"

The Muslims did not want to believe them and they beat them again; but Muhammad, although he had had no idea that the army was so close, saw that the slaves were telling the truth. He asked, "Where is the army and how many of them are there?"

The slaves informed him that the Quraysh were on the far side of the hill, that they numbered about 800 and that everyone who was anyone in Mecca was among them. Only Mr Redface (who had sent a debtor in his place) and Abu Sufyan were missing.

Abu Sufyan was nowhere near Badr. He had switched his route to the coastal road, travelling night and day as fast as the laden camels could trot, and the rich caravan was closer to Mecca than the army was. Abu Sufyan had sent word that there was no need for the army to continue their march because he had saved the caravan; but only two clans had turned back to Mecca.

The Quraysh had known that Muhammad might be still lurking; but they had been confident that he would not dare to fight a whole army. Mr Stupid had persuaded them that marching as far as Badr would be more useful than turning back to Mecca. "We shall spend three days there, slaughter camels, feast and drink wine, and the singing-girls shall play for us. Then the Arabs\* will hear about us and will be so afraid of our military strength that they will never dare fight us again. So come on!" They had been tramping through the desert for eight days and they must have been craving baths and a rest; and they would have looked like cowards if they had walked away from an enemy so much weaker than themselves. That was why they were approaching Badr.<sup>15</sup>

Muhammad set up camp at the furthest well. The Muslims built a tank and diverted every stream in the oasis toward their tank. Then they blocked all the other wells in the oasis.† By the time the Quraysh army arrived on the opposite side of the valley, the

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\* He presumably meant the Muslims. No other tribe wanted to fight them.

† We are never told what the permanent residents of Badr thought of this.

Muslims controlled all the water in Badr. The only way for the Quraysh to access water was to pass the Muslims. Nothing could have been more certain to provoke a fight.

Yet even when Quraysh saw that Muhammad was there in Badr, with an army less than half the size of theirs, some of them still did not want to fight him, for the Muslim army included their own brothers and sons. Mr Stupid accused those men of cowardice, and the brother of the murdered merchant shouted for blood-vengeance. So in the end they decided to confront Muhammad. Neither the Muslims nor the Quraysh tried to negotiate; the Quraysh scouts reported that Muhammad was determined only to fight.

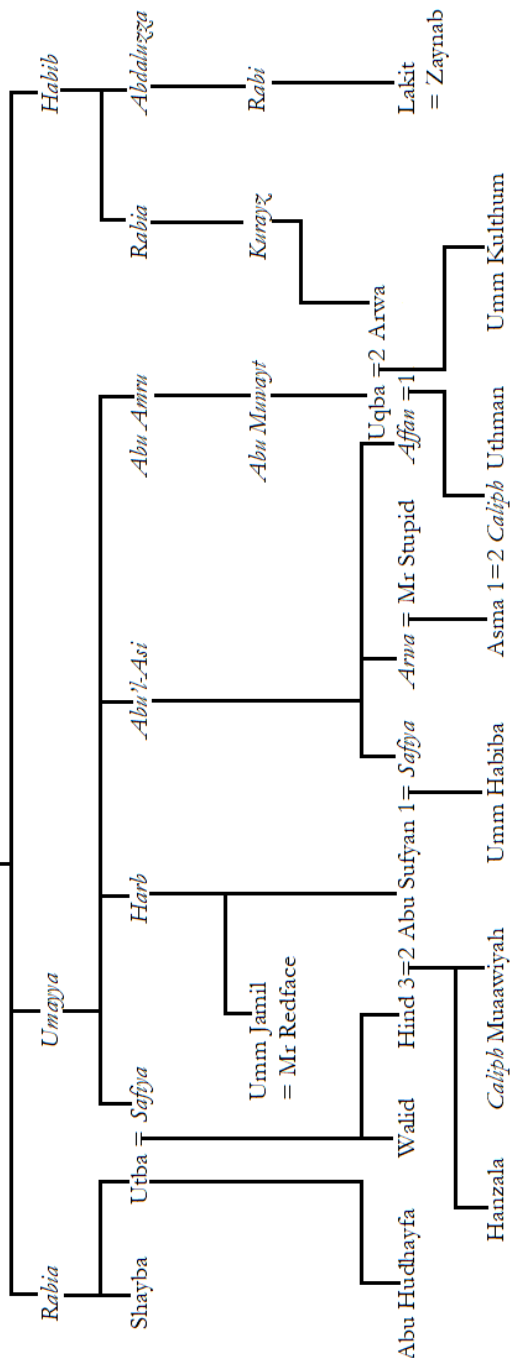
At daybreak on 16 March 624, Muhammad prayed, “O Allah, they called Thy Messenger a liar, so keep Thy promise and destroy them this morning!” Meanwhile Mr Stupid was praying, “O Allah, destroy this morning the man who has harmed his tribe and committed more misdeeds than anyone!”<sup>16</sup>

Muhammad posted his men around his water-tank, urging them to good works until the Quraysh army marched across the valley. The two sides stood opposite each other, the Quraysh with the sun in their eyes. It was a blazing hot day and the Quraysh were feeling the thirst. A Makhzumite named Aswad ran forward, declaring: “I swear that I will drink water from their tank or smash it or die in the attempt!”

Muhammad’s Uncle Hamza stepped in front of the tank to meet Aswad and slashed at his shin so hard that his foot flew off. Aswad crawled back toward the tank, blood streaming out of his stump, and threw himself into it so as to keep his vow. He kicked it with his remaining foot hard enough to crack it, but he had scarcely swallowed a mouthful before Hamza killed him.

At this the Quraysh fired their arrows: one killed one of Umar’s servants and another struck a Comrade at the water-tank.<sup>17</sup>

*Abdshams (clan founder) of the Quraysb in Mecca*





The Quraysh commander stepped forward: he was Utba Abdshams, the father of Abu Sufyan's wife Hind. Only his son and his brother flanked him, and they demanded single combat. They said they had no quarrel with the Comrades and they would only fight Muslims from the Quraysh. Utba's Muslim son volunteered to tackle his father; but Muhammad sent him down and ordered Ali, Uncle Hamza and their elderly kinsman Ubayda to accept the challenge.

The six men faced off. At the first blow, Ubayda and Utba cut each other to the ground. Ali killed Utba's son and Hamza killed his brother. Then Ali and Hamza finished off Utba and carried away Ubayda, who was dripping marrow out of his bone where Utba had cut off his leg.<sup>18</sup>

Muhammad then threw a handful of pebbles in the direction of the enemy ranks and gave the order: "Deform their faces!"

The Muslims charged downward to the Quraysh, screaming, "O Victor, kill!" and, "One! One!" They had a strong blast of wind behind them, while the Quraysh were running against the wind.

For a while Muhammad wove among the ranks, reminding his army of Allah's promise: "Every man who is killed today advancing and not retreating will go to Heaven." One Comrade\* sitting on the sideline threw away his bunch of dates and raced into the battle so that he would reach Heaven faster – and he was killed. Another stripped off his chain-mail and fought unprotected until he was killed. A Muslim whose father had kept him prisoner in Mecca fled from the Quraysh army and began to fight on the side of the Muslims.

Muhammad did not remain with the charge for long. He retreated to a palm-branch hut where he was hidden from the view of the Quraysh. Saad Nabit had built it for him, saying that if they lost the battle, Muhammad could grab a camel and escape back to Medina

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\* His name was Umayr ibn Humam. He was the first suicide *mujahid* in history.

unhurt. Saad – a large, stout man – and his camels guarded the door.<sup>19</sup>

Suddenly they heard neighing and a thunder of hooves that pounded up clouds of dust. Riders in white turbans hurtled down to the valley on dappled horses and plunged into the battle-field, lashing whips, chopping off heads and driving back the Quraysh. It was said that there were 1,000 of them or that the Muslim army was now twice the size of the Quraysh. Whatever their number, it seemed to the Meccans that these terrifying reinforcements had popped out of the mountain from nowhere.

The Quraysh fled the field and were routed.

The Muslims pursued them up over the hill, killing some and grabbing others as captives. Ali, dressed in two mail-coats, proved very quick with his sword: it is said that he killed nine men and helped to kill at least five more. One Comrade fought until his sword broke; then he returned to Muhammad, who gave him a wooden cudgel,\* so he fought on until the end. An Immigrant killed his own father. Umar killed his uncle.

Abu Bakr spotted his polytheist son among the enemy. He shouted out to him, “What have you done with my property in Mecca?” The young man screamed back that there was nothing left except “a sword to kill a stupid old man!” Yet when he had the chance to kill his father, he dutifully restrained himself. Abu Bakr said later that if he had had the chance to kill his son, he would certainly have taken it.

Bilal located Umayya Juma, the master who had tortured him in Mecca, and he screamed to his friends, “The arch-infidel! Don’t let me live if he does!” They soon became a thick wall of swords that hacked Umayya and his son to pieces.<sup>20</sup>

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\* The official story, told decades after the event, is that the cudgel miraculously transformed itself into a sword. It is more likely that a new sword was awarded to the warrior as part of the battle-plunder.

By this time there were no more men on dappled horses. The Muslims later claimed that their mysterious assistants had been angels; and the Quraysh went along with this explanation, for it saved the faces of the men who had fled the battle to blame their humiliation on a supernatural force. Perhaps they had really been bandits, swooping down to grab a part of the plunder and with no desire to be identified and challenged. That might explain why, as soon as the Quraysh were in full flight, the Muslims began quarrelling over the loot.

Muhammad emerged from his hut to supervise. He ordered that all the valuables must be brought to a communal pile. Everyone would be given an equal share later, but first they must deal with the dead and wounded lying on the field. In particular, Mr Stupid must be confirmed dead but any member of the Hashim clan must be brought in alive.

Soon the shepherd Ibn Masud returned, declaring, "Behold the head of Allah's enemy!" and he threw it at Muhammad's feet. He had found his foe lying at his last gasp with his foot cut off and, after a final exchange of insults, he had personally beheaded him. Muhammad said he would rather have Mr Stupid's head than the finest camel and he rewarded Ibn Masud with Mr Stupid's silver-inlaid sword.

The Muslims found 64 dead Quraysh. Among the slain were Muhammad's old business partner, Saïb, together with his two sons; Khadija's troublesome brother Naowfal; a son of Abu Sufyan; and several elders of Mecca. Muhammad ordered that their corpses should be thrown into a dirty dry well. He stood by the well, calling, "Utba, Umayya Juma, Mr Stupid, have you found out that Allah's threats are true? You people in the well were evil kinsfolk to your prophet! You called me a liar and threw me out and fought against me. Now you know that I was telling the truth!"

Fourteen Muslims had also been killed, including the legless Ubayda, who had composed poetry as he bled to death. They were

*shabeed*\* and of course they were now in Heaven.<sup>21</sup>

Seventy Quraysh prisoners were brought in alive. The affable Musaab saw his own brother being bound up by a Comrade. “Tie him tightly,” he advised, “for his mother is a wealthy woman. She’ll pay you a huge ransom for him.”

The captive protested: “Is that the sort of advice you give about your own brother?”

Musaab, unworried, told him, “This man is now my brother in your place.”

Muhammad noticed his Uncle Abbas among the prisoners. He relieved him of 800 gold coins, saying that Allah had granted it to him as plunder. Yet he tossed and turned that night, too tormented by images of Abbas writhing in his prison to fall asleep. In the end he ordered Abbas to be untied and then he slept soundly. All the other prisoners were kept with their hands uncomfortably fastened to their necks.

By contrast, the Comrades took seriously Muhammad’s instruction to treat the prisoners well. Musaab’s brother said that even when his captors were running out of bread, they would give him their last roll and go hungry themselves. Not to be outdone, he would try to pass it back to them, but they would not take it. However, at least some of this food had been pillaged from the Quraysh army’s captured baggage.

The Muslims remained three days in Badr before Muhammad ordered the return march to Medina. On the first halt out of Badr, they divided up the loot. Anyone who had killed a man could plunder the corpse; but whatever had been picked up from the deserted field – money, swords, mail-coats, clothes, leather bags, saddles, camels – was divided into equal shares among every

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\* A *shabeed* was a Muslim who died in the course of his Islamic duties. Although this word is sometimes translated “martyr”, it very often referred to a person who had been killed in battle in a war of aggression.

freeman. Four men were slaves, and they were not granted a share. However, the slave who supervised the captives received gifts from their captors worth more than one share. Muhammad's share included a sword called Beheader and Mahri, a magnificent camel with a silver nose-ring who had belonged to Mr Stupid.

All future disputes about spoils were settled by Allah's decree.

*And know that whatever thing you gain,  
a fifth of it is for Allah and for the Messenger  
and for the near of kin  
and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer.*<sup>22</sup>

Among the captives was Nadir Abdaldar, the teller of Persian tales. In revenge for his storytelling, Muhammad gave the order, and Ali beheaded him.

At the next night's halt it was the turn of Uqba Umayya, the nuisance-neighbour who had tossed entrails into Muhammad's cooking pot. When Muhammad ordered him to be killed, Uqba protested, "Who will look after my children?"

"Hell!" replied Muhammad. And Uqba was beheaded.<sup>23</sup>

They arrived in Medina to hear that Muhammad's daughter Ruqayya had died. They had just missed her funeral.<sup>24</sup>

The Robbery at Badr was a political turning-point. When the Meccans first heard that they had been defeated, they thought the messenger was mad. When they realised that he was telling the truth, the humiliation was a catastrophe for Mecca. Muhammad would do what he liked and a whole army of Quraysh had been unable to stop him.

One week after the battle, Mr Redface died of measles. The older generation of Quraysh leaders had now been wiped out. Abu Sufyan was quietly accepted as the new high chief of Mecca.

His wife Hind, who had lost her father, uncle, brother and firstborn son at Badr, declared: "Fate has opposed us wickedly. It

was a war that will kindle another war, for every man has a friend to avenge. Let us fall on Medina with an overwhelming attack, for we have the cavalry.’<sup>25</sup>

Muhammad produced a long prophecy about the Robbery at Badr.<sup>26</sup> This dramatic victory was the proof that Allah rewarded the Muslims and punished the unbelievers.

*So you did not slay them, but it was Allah Who slew them, and you did not smite when you smote, but it was Allah Who smote ...*<sup>27</sup>

The role of the angels was clear.

*Your Lord revealed to the angels: ‘I am with you, therefore make firm those who believe. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them. This is because they acted adversely to Allah and His Messenger; and whoever acts adversely to Allah and His Messenger – then surely Allah is severe in requiting.’*<sup>28</sup>

So was the duty of the Muslims.

*O Prophet! urge the believers to war; if there are 20 patient ones of you they shall overcome 200, and if there are 100 of you they shall overcome 1000 of those who disbelieve, because they are a people who do not understand.*<sup>29</sup>

There was only one circumstance under which Allah required them to show mercy to unbelievers.

*And fight with them until there is no more persecution and religion should be only for Allah; but if they desist, then surely Allah sees what they do.*<sup>30</sup>

Hence the Robbery at Badr was also a moral turning-point. The Muslims felt invincible. They were confident they had Allah’s permission to fight His enemies and to impose Islam by the sword.

It was the beginning of *jihad*.\*

## Summary

- Muhammad alienated the Jews and some other Medinans, whom he labelled “hypocrites”, by his implausible claims and his requests for money.
- Trying to control the situation in Medina, he became violent.
- Because he needed money, he organised a series of armed robberies against Quraysh trading caravans. The first few were unsuccessful. Then the Muslims murdered a Meccan.
- The Jews publicly rejected Muhammad’s claim to be a prophet. Muhammad changed the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca.
- The Robbery at Badr was a great triumph: Muhammad not only plundered the Quraysh army-camp but killed nearly seventy Meccans.

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## References and Notes to *Chapter 8: The Great Robbery at Badr*

1 Q5:49-50. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 246, 263, 266-268. Bukhari 4:56:829; 6:60:79. Muslim 17:4214. Abu Dawud 24:3584; 39:4479.

2 Q3:118. *See also* Q4:144.

3 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 239, 242-247, 258, 261-263.

4 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 280-286, 504. Waqidi (Faizer) 6-8. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:2-7. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:33. Abu Dawud 19:2998.

5 Q2:217 (Shakir).

6 Q2:190 (Shakir).

7 Q2:191a, 193a (Shakir).

8 Q2:216 (Shakir).

9 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 286-288, 298. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 738 #349, #350. Waqidi (Faizer) 8-11. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:7-9. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:92.

10 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 255, 257-258, 268-270, 288. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:283-287.

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\* *Jihad* was an ordinary Arabic word that meant “struggle” in a general sense. However, fairly soon after Muhammad’s arrival in Medina, *jihad* acquired its modern meaning of “holy war”.

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- 11 Q2:185, 187. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:284, 292. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 2:250-251.
- 12 Q2:185a (Shakir).
- 13 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 136, 289, 293-296, 300, 365. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 738 #354, #355, #356. Waqidi (Faizer) 12-15, 23-25, 100. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:9-12, 42, 131-132. Bukhari 5:59:292. Muslim 20:4680. Abu Dawud 14:2675. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:29.
- 14 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 289, 291, 293-295. Waqidi (Faizer) 15-21, 23, 25-26. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:11, 13. Muslim 19:4394. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:29-30.
- 15 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 291, 295-296, 310. Waqidi (Faizer) 22-24, 27-28. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:9, 11-14. Muslim 19:4394. Abu Dawud 14:2675. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:30-33. About 950 had marched from Mecca; but because two clans had returned home the previous day, only about 800 actually fought the Muslims at Badr.
- 16 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 296-301. Waqidi (Faizer) 28, 31-36. Muslim 19:4360. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:31, 33.
- 17 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 297, 299-301, 337. Waqidi (Faizer) 30, 34-35. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:16. Muslim 19:4424. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:31.
- 18 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 299. Waqidi (Faizer) 35-36. Abu Dawud 14:2659. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:33.
- 19 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 297, 299-301, 329-330. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 739 #372. Waqidi (Faizer) 26, 29-31, 37. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:13; (Bewley) 3:337, 340. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:129. Muslim 20:4680. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:32, 55-56.
- 20 Q3:13; 8:9. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 260, 301, 303, 305, 310, 337-338, 363. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 739 #375, #377; 746-749 #499-536. Waqidi (Faizer) 39-40, 46-47. Bukhari 3:38:498; 5:59:309, 310, 311. Muslim 19:4360. Abu Dawud 19:2995. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q58:22. Suyuti (Jarrett) 35.
- 21 Q3:13; 8:9, 12-13 (Shakir). Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 299, 301, 303-308, 310, 336-338. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 739 #367, #371; 747 #520. Waqidi (Faizer) 36-37, 39, 45-47, 51, 56, 74-77. Bukhari 2:23:452; 4:52:64; 4:53:369; 5:59:314, 318; 8:76:558, 572; 9:93:519, 532. Muslim 19:4341, 4360, 4421; 40:6870. Abu Dawud 14:2675, 2731. Nasa'i 3:21:2076, 2077, 2078.
- 22 Q8:41a (Shakir).
- 23 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 301, 308-310, 338-339, 360, 457, 505. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 740 #384; 748-749 #532. Waqidi (Faizer) 49, 50-53, 59, 75, 282, 302. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:118; (Bewley) 3:35. Muslim 19:4360. Abu Dawud 14:2732, 2741. Tirmidhi 3:19:1561. Ibn Maja 4:24:2808. The sword's name in Arabic is *Dhu'l-Fiqar*. *Mabri* was the camel's breed. Mr Stupid had doubtless given him a personal name, but this is lost to history.
- 24 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 308. Waqidi (Faizer) 58. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:25.
- 25 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 309-311, 337-338, 342-343, 345, 358-359, 361. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 750 #557. Margoliouth (1905) 153, 272-273. Watt (1956) 14. Ibn Hisham doubts that Hind literally spoke the first two sentences; but he does not doubt the third, and there is no question that the attributed words reflect her real attitude.
- 26 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 321. Bukhari 6:60:168, 404.
- 27 Q8:17 (Shakir).
- 28 Q8:12-13 (Shakir).
- 29 Q8:65 (Shakir).
- 30 Q8:39 (Shakir).



## *Poets, Polytheists and Jews*

**March 624 – March 625**

“Is this true? Did Muhammad really kill those noblemen? Then we’d be better off if the earth opened up and swallowed us!” This was how the Jewish leader, Kaab Nadir, reacted to the Robbery at Badr.

“Islam has shown its true colours!” This was the verdict of the Lion high chief Abdallah Aowf.

*Damn you, Nabit! You’ve no gall!  
 Damn you, Aowf and Lions all!  
 How can you expect some good  
 from the thief who shed our blood?  
 You don’t need to heed that stranger –  
 Cowards, recognise the danger!  
 Someone, strike him by surprise;  
 end his murders, thefts and lies!*

This was the protest of Asma Khatma, a humble mother of five from the Wolf tribe. She called for Muhammad’s assassination because there was no way to bring a clan-chief to the law-court; but she was of such low status that there was no danger that anyone would take her seriously.

On the day when Muhammad returned victorious to Medina, he asked: “Who will rid me of Asma Khatma?”

One of Asma’s own relatives broke into her house that night, prised her baby from her breast and plunged his sword through her heart. Then he dared the Khatma family: “If you try for revenge, I’ll kill you all!” They were so terrified that every one of them converted to Islam.

The aged Abu Afak also complained about the Robbery at Badr.

*There came by a horseman who split us in two,  
permitting, forbidding on what we should do.  
If Lions and Wolves never bow down to kings,  
why heed we a stranger on all kinds of things?*

Muhammad sent a man from Abu Afak's clan who caught the poet unawares by night and impaled him through his liver. "Take that, no matter how old you are!" Abu Afak's screams brought his household running, but they were too late. They vowed to kill the assassin; but although every Muslim knew his name, nobody betrayed it.<sup>1</sup>

Abdallah Aowf suddenly became afraid that he might be killed next. He took his polytheist friends to Muhammad, and they all declared themselves Muslims. Muhammad needed Abdallah's political support and he accepted their allegiance.

For several months Abdallah made a public display of supporting Muhammad. He would sit in a special seat in the mosque, and every Friday, just before Muhammad began to preach, he would announce: "This is Allah's Messenger among you! Hear and obey!"

Nevertheless, everyone knew that Abdallah had been a reluctant convert. Muhammad never trusted his loyalty and he was soon calling him the "chief hypocrite".<sup>2</sup>

In despair of Abdallah Aowf, the Quraysh elders appealed to Medina's Jews.

You are men of weapons and fortresses. You must  
fight Muhammad or we shall deal with you as we see  
fit; and we shall undress your women.

The Jews knew that the Quraysh threats were empty, but Kaab Nadir went straight to Mecca to discuss with how they might all cooperate to keep Muhammad under control. Every Meccan who spoke to Kaab received a threat from Muhammad, until in the end there was nobody left in Mecca who was brave enough to host him.<sup>3</sup>

One legal consequence of the Robbery at Badr was that it had effectively ended the Compact of Medina. It had stipulated that:

Whoever commits a murder invites the death penalty  
on his whole household,

and that:

This compact will not protect the unjust and the  
sinner.<sup>4</sup>

The Robbery at Badr had removed Muhammad and his 312\* closest followers from the protection of the Compact. Non-Muslims in Medina were no longer bound by any responsibilities toward these 313 individuals. Since they were exactly the people who were the backbone of the Muslim community, this meant, in practice, that the Compact was no more.

Meanwhile, Ramadan, the month of fasting, had ended, and Muhammad announced that there would be a new festival. The first *Eid al-Fitr* was accompanied by a new prayer-ritual in the mosque, a parade and a compulsory alms-tax, later fixed at 2.5% of one's wealth.<sup>5</sup> It was probably less a feast-to-break-the-fast than it was a celebration of the military victory.

Muhammad's Uncle Hamza took the festivities too seriously. He sat drinking with some Comrades while a slave-girl sang: "O Hamza, slaughter those two fat old camels!" Hamza seized his sword and, seeing two camels sitting on the street, sliced off their humps, slashed open their flanks and cut out parts of their livers.

A few minutes later, he was confronted by a stern Muhammad, the faithful Zayd and a distraught Ali. Those camels had been Ali's loot from the Robbery at Badr and he had depended on being able to hire them out as beasts of burden.

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\* Although only 305 Muslims fought in the battle, another eight men, for technical reasons, were credited with a spiritual status equal to that of a Badr warrior and were entitled to a share of the plunder.

Uncle Hamza was too drunk to process the rebuke. He stared red-eyed at Muhammad's knees, then at his stomach, then at his face, before demanding: "Who are you lot? Nothing but my father's slaves!"<sup>6</sup>

The Jews were still criticising Muhammad's attack at Badr, so he decided to deal with them. He called them to an assembly in Qaynuqa Bazaar and told them: "You know from your scriptures that I am a prophet sent by Allah, so it's time for you to become Muslims. Otherwise Allah might punish you in the way He punished the Quraysh."

The Jews replied, "Muhammad, you are not our chief. Don't fool yourself just because you killed a few Quraysh, for they don't know how to fight. As for us, we are masters of war. If you fought people like us, you would find that we are real men."

Muhammad understood these defiant words as hostility to himself and a breaking of the Compact of Medina.

A day or two later, while tensions were running high, a brawl broke out in the Qaynuqa Bazaar. A Qaynuqa goldsmith pranked a Muslim woman by creeping up behind her and pinning her hem to her back. She stood up, indecently exposed, and screamed. A Muslim man jumped up and killed the Jew. Then a band of goldsmiths leapt on the Muslim and killed him. His family called on the Muslim community to help them against the Jews.

Instead of settling blood-money with the individuals involved in the fight, Muhammad announced that he feared treachery from the whole Qaynuqa tribe. On 13 April he declared war on them.

The Qaynuqa retreated to a great stone fortress where the Muslim army could not reach them. Muhammad besieged them vigorously, but they did not retaliate by so much as firing an arrow. After two weeks they became afraid. On the evening of 28 April 624 they surrendered unconditionally to Muhammad.

He ordered the men to be killed and all their possessions to be

forfeit.

The Qaynuqa were old allies of the Lions. When the Lion high chief Abdallah Aowf passed and saw his allies shackled with their hands behind their backs, he forced his way past Muhammad's doorman (who shoved him back and made his face bleed) until he stood in the Prophet's presence.

"Muhammad," he demanded, "treat my friends kindly!" Muhammad ignored this, so Abdallah grabbed his collar from behind and threatened: "I will not let you go unless you treat them kindly! This tribe protected me from my enemies in the last two wars, and you can't mow them down in one morning."

Muhammad was not ready to defy Abdallah Aowf, so he had to abandon the idea of killing the Qaynuqa. "Release them, may Allah curse them and curse you too!" Instead he took their property and banished them from Medina. They were allowed enough camels to carry the women and children. The men and camels walked northward through the desert until they reached Syria, where they settled, though not for long.

Back in Medina, the Muslims took over all the weapons and goldsmiths' tools of the Qaynuqa. 20% was given to Muhammad and 80% to his warriors. Muhammad scored two mail-coats, three bows, three swords and three spears.

In a new prophecy, he warned Abdallah Aowf: "Any Muslim who takes Jews or Christians as his friends is one of them. Your heart is sick. If you took Allah and the Muslims as your friends, you would be a winner."

By evicting the Qaynuqa from Medina, Muhammad had broken the letter as well as the spirit of the Compact of Medina. After this, nobody even pretended that the famous Compact still existed.<sup>7</sup>

Next Muhammad dealt with the Quraysh prisoners whom he had captured at Badr. In theory, he could have kept them in Medina as his slaves; but he did not want to do that. The Meccans knew

embarrassing secrets about his past and they had already gossiped to the Jews about the Satanic Verses incident. It was time to shut up their chattering.

Umar wanted to behead them. Abu Bakr argued that it would be more useful to set them for ransom, since lenient treatment would make it more likely that they would convert to Islam eventually.

Muhammad accepted Abu Bakr's suggestion. He set the price of ransom at 4,000 silver coins; but this was a maximum from which the Quraysh were supposed to bargain down. Some of them, like Musaab's mother, were so wealthy that they did not bother to bargain; but others were so poor that Muhammad eventually had to release their relatives for nothing.

Uncle Abbas claimed he did not have any money, but Muhammad called his bluff, and Abbas had to pay.

Muhammad refused the cash ransom that his daughter Zaynab sent for her husband Lakit. He sent his son-in-law back to Mecca with instructions that Zaynab must redeem her spouse by presenting herself in Medina and taking up residence with her Muslim family in the mosque.<sup>8</sup>

Ali complained that, since Uncle Hamza had killed his two camels, he had nothing in the world and he could not afford to marry Fatima. Muhammad urged him to give her his cheap mail-shirt and tattered old cloak as a dower. In fact Ali was exaggerating his poverty, for he had a third camel and a few other items, all of which he now sold. On Muhammad's advice, Ali spent a third of the cash on household goods and two-thirds on celebratory perfume. Saad Nabit donated a ram for the feast, and so they were married.

They began their life together with only a sheepskin mattress, two leather pillows, a water-pitcher and one cup. Since they had no slaves, Fatima carried water, milled grains and swept the floor until she was bruised, blistered and dusty.<sup>9</sup>

On 6 June the Muslims celebrated the first *Eid al-Adha* in Medina.

The polytheists of Mecca had always performed this ceremony at the Kaaba, but it was the first time *Adha* had been celebrated as a Muslim festival for Allah. Muhammad led the prayers then slaughtered two goats with his own hands. He distributed animals for slaughter among Muslims who had none of their own and he urged them to eat everything within three days so that they would share their leftovers with their poor neighbours.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile Abu Sufyan, high chief of Mecca, had vowed not to sleep with a woman until he had taken revenge for Badr. He brought 200 warriors to the edge of Medina then crept into the Jewish side of the city. Huayy Nadir was too frightened to let him in, but the Nadir treasurer provided food and wine. He also told Abu Sufyan all the news about Muhammad's movements. The next morning Abu Sufyan sent his army to raid an orchard on the outskirts of Medina: they burned some young palm-trees and killed two men. Then they raced away; by the time Muhammad's army was saddled and ready to chase them, Abu Sufyan was too far ahead to be caught. Abu Sufyan had kept his vow; but of course it was only a token. He still intended to plot a proper revenge later.<sup>11</sup>

Other tribes had become angry with Muhammad. The Ghatafan were allies of the Jews in Medina. The Sulaym had relatives who had been killed at Badr. Three times Muhammad heard rumours that the Sulaym or the Ghatafan or both were gathering an army to attack him, so he took his own men out on expeditions to fight them. He never found the alleged armies; if the plots had ever existed, the plotters had always fled by the time he arrived. They were nomadic tribes who were difficult to track in the vast desert. Each time Muhammad had to return home without fighting anyone, although once he was able to steal a herd of 500 camels and kidnap their herders.

Another time, when was lying down unarmed and alone, a Ghatafan chief named Duthur crept up on him and, waving his sword, boasted, "Look, I can kill you!"

If Duthur had been serious about killing Muhammad, he would have taken more care to outnumber and ambush him; so he was presumably demonstrating that he would not kill him just because he could but would rather negotiate. It did not work out as Duthur intended, for Muhammad managed to knock the sword out of his hands and pick it up himself. “Look, now I can kill you!”

Duthur had the presence of mind to squeak out: “I testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His prophet!”

So Muhammad had to spare his life. He told Duthur to go home and convert his clan to Islam. The Ghatafan “army” remained invisible.<sup>12</sup>

By this time Kaab Nadir had returned to Medina. He had written politically incorrect poetry about the Robbery at Badr.

*Mills of Badr, grind out blood,  
grieve for Badr, weep a flood.  
Noblemen in ditches lie,  
lords were left alone to die.  
What can heal my endless pain  
for the day my friends were slain?  
Noble Harith\* will do right:  
with his army he will fight!*

He also wrote a love-song about Muhammad’s Aunt Lubaba.

*... in full disguise, her hair she dyes  
and paints the henna round her eyes;  
her chest goes bump when she shakes her rump  
and tries to stand – but she’s far too plump.  
She could requite my lovesick plight:  
she shines so bright she lights the night!*

“O Allah, protect me from Kaab’s poetry!” said Muhammad. “He has offended me, so who will get rid of him for me?”

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\* This was Mr Stupid’s brother.



Saad Nabit, the Wolf high chief, encouraged the ruffian Ibn Maslama to volunteer. Ibn Maslama owed favours to the Nadir tribe, who had fed and sheltered him when his own tribe would not, and he was an old friend of Kaab's; but he had now switched his loyalty completely to Muhammad. He said he would need to tell some lies, and Muhammad told him to say whatever was necessary.

Ibn Maslama plotted with four friends, one of whom was Kaab's foster-brother. The foster brother went to Kaab, pretending that he was disillusioned with Islam but was too afraid of Muhammad to leave. He said his family needed food, and Kaab agreed to sell him some and to accept his weapons as a pledge of future payment.

So when five men bearing weapons knocked on Kaab's door in the middle of the night, he was not suspicious. He went down to meet them, and they all chatted for a while and recited poetry. Then the five attacked. Kaab's screams caused all the neighbours to light their lamps, until Ibn Maslama drove a dagger through his stomach. Then he cut off his head. They all ran away before the Jews could reach the streets.<sup>13</sup>

The next morning, 7 September 624, Muhammad made a public proclamation to the Muslims: "Kill any Jew who falls into your power."

On hearing these words, a Muslim merchant jumped on his Jewish business-partner and killed him.

Every Jew in Medina feared for his life. They were afraid of being sought out in their homes like Kaab and terrified of leaving their houses. Even the polytheists remained in their houses without speaking in case they had managed to offend Muhammad.

The day after this second murder, Huayy Nadir took courage and confronted Muhammad. "Our friend was attacked by night and treacherously murdered, yet he never committed any crime."

Muhammad retorted: "If Kaab had kept quiet about his opinions,

he would not have been murdered. He hurt us and wrote insulting poetry. If anyone else does this, swords will be unsheathed again.” Then he invited them to write a new compact, a frank admission that the old one had long since lost its force.

The conditions were that the Muslims would stop killing Jews if the Jews stopped “hurting” Muhammad and “never assisted anyone against him.” Huayy swore the oath, taking God as his witness. The contract was put in writing and deposited with Ali. The terms were unequal, and Huayy swore under duress; but if he had refused to swear, the murders would have continued. Perhaps he was counting on the expectation that Muhammad would break his side of the bargain.

For several months the Jews behaved humbly and cautiously.<sup>14</sup>

In November Muhammad heard about another Quraysh caravan on its way to Syria. He sent his son Zayd with a hundred men to an oasis where they attacked it. Most of the merchants, including Abu Sufyan, managed to escape, but Zayd brought home a caravan-load of silver vessels. Each warrior was awarded 800 silver coins. They had also captured a Bedouin guide. They told him that they would not kill him if he became a Muslim, so he became a Muslim\* and they did not kill him.<sup>15</sup>

In December Muhammad married off his last remaining daughter. Uthman, the widower of Ruqayya, agreed to take her sister Umm Kulthum, who, since her divorce, had reached the spinsterly age of 24 without finding a new suitor. Muhammad’s advice for his daughter’s happiness in marriage was: “Go to all lengths to obey your husband’s wishes and to live at peace with him.”<sup>16</sup>

An Arab chief expected to have multiple wives; but Muhammad still had only two. The truth was, his options were limited. He had recognised that it would be politically unwise to marry a proud

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\* His name was Furat ibn Hayyan. He was the first man in history to be converted to Islam by force.

Comrade lady; and the Immigrants had hardly any single women. Further, he required his family to live in poverty.<sup>17</sup> Despite these disadvantages, in 625 he finally found two widows who were willing to marry him.

The first was Hafsa, eldest daughter of Umar, whom Muhammad had admired even while her first husband was alive. As soon as the young warrior was dead, Muhammad declared his desire to marry her. She was nineteen years old, strong-willed and outspoken. There was no risk of alienating Umar should Hafsa become unhappy; in fact, Umar claimed that if Muhammad commanded it, he would cut off his daughter's head. Muhammad and Umar settled the marriage contract in late January 625.<sup>18</sup>

The second was Zaynab, widow of Ubayda, the Muslim who had been killed in the duel at Badr. Now in her late twenties, she had a reputation for generous almsgiving and she wanted to marry her Prophet. Her cousin travelled from Mecca to offer her proposal to Muhammad, and he added her to his wives in February.<sup>19</sup>

Muhammad now had four wives. A few weeks later, his cousin, also named Zaynab, proposed that he marry her too. This was awkward. Not only had Muhammad never given a thought to his hot-tempered cousin, but his son Zayd was attracted to her. Muhammad produced a revelation from Allah that four was the maximum number of wives that any Muslim should have.

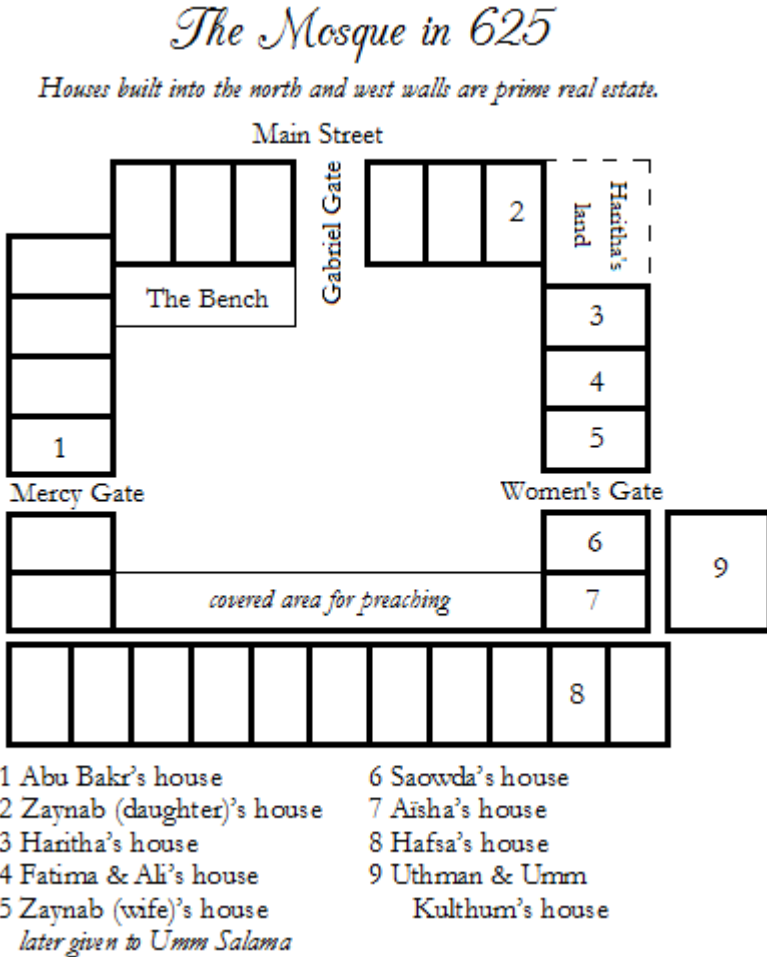
When he told Zaynab that she should marry Zayd instead, she was affronted. She protested that, "I don't want that, for I am a Quraysh widow," while Zayd was nothing but a freed slave.

Gabriel sent a special prophecy just for Zaynab.

*It is not for a believing man or a believing woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decided a matter, that they should have any choice about their affair.*<sup>20</sup>

Zaynab was a devout Muslim. She married Zayd.<sup>21</sup>

Muhammad was dissatisfied that Ali's house was so far from the



mosque. He told Fatima that he wanted them to move nearer “but I’m embarrassed to ask Haritha to move his house again.”

His neighbour Haritha heard of the problem and once again vacated his house for the next one in the row. “Allah’s Messenger,” he said, “I’ve heard that you want to move Fatima near you, and my houses are the nearest of all. I and my money are for Allah and His Messenger, and what you take from me makes me happier than what I keep.”

So Fatima and Ali took Haritha’s old house, which placed them

almost next door to Uthman and Umm Kulthum. They could not help noticing the difference in lifestyle. While Fatima laboured at the millstone, the aristocratic Uthman delegated the household chores to slaves and clothed Umm Kulthum in red silk. After a few months, when Muhammad brought in a consignment of war-captives, Fatima went to ask her father for a slave to help with the housework. He was out, so Aïsha conveyed the message.

Muhammad visited late at night, when Fatima and Ali were already in bed. "Stay where you are," he said, and sat down at the foot of their sheepskin, his cold feet on Ali's abdomen, to explain the duties of Islam's holy family.

"I can't give you such a luxury," he said, "while the people on The Bench are starving. All my prisoners must be sold to raise money to feed them. Fear Allah, Fatima, and do your housework! Shall I tell you something that is better than having a slave? After every prayer, say, 'Glory to Allah,' ten times, then, 'Praise Allah,' ten times, then, 'Allah is greater,' ten times. At bedtime say 33 *glories*, 33 *praises* and 34 *greaters*. That will be better for you than a slave."

Fatima had to submit. "I am pleased with Allah Most High and with His Messenger."<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile the Quraysh had devised their revenge-plot for the fathers, sons and brothers who had been killed at Badr. The humble Bakr tribe, which lived in Mecca and was dependent on Quraysh goodwill, agreed to help, and mercenary soldiers were hired. Abu Sufyan was the high commander of an army of 3,000 men, 3,000 camels and 200 horses. Two Makhzumites, Mr Stupid's son Ikrima and Walid's son Khalid, were in charge of the cavalry. Fifteen women, including Abu Sufyan's wife Hind, came as cheer-leaders. Their job was to urge the men to fight and to shame any who ran away.

The Quraysh and their allies marched out to the valley of Mount Uhud opposite Medina. They released their animals all over the barley fields until nothing green was left. Abdallah Aowf, high chief

of the Lions, advised Muhammad to wait for them to enter Medina itself. Then the men would fight in the alley-ways, the women and children would throw rocks from the walls, and the Meccans would be defeated – for no enemy army had ever won a battle within the city walls. Most of the Muslims protested that this would make them look weak and cowardly and they begged Muhammad to lead them out to a pitched battle against “those dogs”. In the end he agreed. He marched out with 1,000 men.

Abu Sufyan sent a message to the Comrades. “We have no quarrel with you Wolves and Lions. We won’t attack you if you just let me deal with Muhammad.” Abdallah Aowf agreed that he had no quarrel with the Quraysh; he also saw that the Medinans were outnumbered and was offended that Muhammad had rejected his advice. He turned around and went home, and a third of the army decided to return with him. The remainder sent a rude answer to Abu Sufyan.<sup>23</sup>

On 21 March 625 the two armies lined up on opposite sides of the valley. The Muslims were now outnumbered over four to one. Muhammad, wearing two mail-coats, told the captain of the archers: “Keep the cavalry away from us with your arrows. Don’t let them come on us from the rear, no matter what happens; and don’t move from your position, so that they can’t reach us from your direction.”

As the two armies approached each other, the women stood up beating their tambourines and drums while Hind led the singing.

*Advance, ye who the standard bear!*  
*Advance, ye who protect our rear!*  
*Advance and smite them with your spear!*  
  
*Advance, and we’ll embrace you;*  
*Retreat, and we’ll disgrace you,*  
*in our love displace you ...*

Uncle Hamza was in the frontline, leading the Muslims who lacked

armour. Both sides charged, with the Muslims yelling, “Kill! Kill!” while the Meccans threw rocks and screamed, “Al-Lat! Al-Uzza! Hubal!” The men fought and “the battle grew hot” as the Muslim archers terrified the Meccan horses.

One Muslim nearly killed Abu Sufyan, but a Meccan stepped in and struck him down in time. Another killed a pair of Meccan brothers. Their mother vowed, “If ever I get hold of him, I will drink wine from his skull!” One Muslim ran to attack someone who was screaming at the Meccans to keep fighting; his sword was suspended over his enemy’s head before a high-pitched shriek revealed that it was Hind. He thought better of using his sword on a woman.<sup>24</sup>

Hind was shouting, “Come on, Darkie! Avenge us and yourself!” The “darkie” was Wahshi, a slave belonging to Jubayr Naowfal.\* Hamza had killed Jubayr’s uncle at Badr, so Jubayr wanted to kill Hamza. Wahshi was a never-miss javelinist, and Jubayr had promised to set him free in exchange for killing Hamza. Hamza had killed Hind’s uncle too, so she thought this was a fine plan.

Hamza was lumbering like a great camel, throwing his sword around and killing everyone whom he struck. He killed one of the Meccan standard-bearers. Then he killed the brother of Khabbab the swordsmith, who had tortured Khabbab in Mecca.

At that moment the slave Wahshi launched his javelin, and it struck Hamza through the stomach. He staggered forward and fell. Wahshi waited until he was dead, then stepped out to retrieve his javelin and cut out Hamza’s liver. After that he had no more interest in the battle, so he returned to camp. (Jubayr kept his promise and freed him.)<sup>25</sup>

Muhammad’s wife Aïsha and daughter-in-law Baraka were working as battle-auxiliaries. With her skirts hitched up above her

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\* Jubayr was the son of Muhammad’s old protector Mutim. He had been engaged to Aïsha before Muhammad asked for her.

anklets, Aisha hurried back and forth to refill her pitcher, then poured water into the mouths of the warriors. Baraka's skirt was hit by an enemy arrow. She tripped and fell, indecently exposed, but she was not seriously hurt.<sup>26</sup>

The Muslims killed the Meccan standard-bearers one after the other. One bearer fought until his hands were cut off, then he knelt on the standard and pinned it to his chest with his chin until he was killed over it. The standard lay on the ground until one of the women picked it up and held it aloft for the Meccans.

Muhammad's cousin Zubayr made for Khalid and he attacked the Meccan cavalry until they retreated. Khalid tried to counter-charge, but Muhammad's archers rained arrows down upon him. The Muslims kept fighting until they had cut off the Meccans' retreat and the Meccans were routed. The Quraysh women picked up their skirts and fled, showing their anklets as they ran. The Muslims could have easily captured them.

At that moment, when the Muslim victory looked certain, the Muslim archers abandoned their post of duty. Seeing that the Meccans were cut off from their camp, they swarmed into it, shouting, "The plunder! The plunder!" This exposed the rear to the Meccan cavalry. Khalid and Ikrima sent the horsemen forward, finished off the few archers who had held to their posts, then charged the Muslims from behind.

The Muslim army was thrown into confusion. They retreated, dropping their loot, lashing out blindly at the new attack and even felling their own men, while the Meccans cut them down and killed dozens of them. A shout arose: "I have killed Muhammad!"

The Muslims panicked. The Meccans pursued them until they fled in every direction, and the survivors ran a long way.<sup>27</sup>

After the Muslims were decimated and routed, a remnant was left hiding in the hills. One of them recognised familiar eyes gleaming beneath a helmet. It was Muhammad. He had not been killed after



all, although his helmet had shattered, two of his teeth were broken and he had a bleeding gash on his forehead. He was still exposed to the enemy arrows, so a dozen of his friends made a human shield around him. They were so exhausted they could hardly hold their swords; but they resisted their drowsiness to fire at the Meccans until their quivers were empty. Several of the bodyguard were killed before they finally drove the Meccans off. Fatima, who had arrived with provisions, washed her father's wounds and then cauterised them with palm-ashes.

The battle was lost. The Quraysh women walked among the corpses, chopping limbs and stabbing chests, cutting off ears and noses and making them into anklets, bracelets and necklaces. Hind gave hers as a present to Wahshi, and he gave her Hamza's liver. She tried to eat it; but it tasted so foul that she could not swallow it and she spat it out. Then she climbed a hill and shrieked:

*“Now we have revenge on you!  
Paid you back for those you slew!  
Father, brother, uncle too  
and my firstborn son I rue.  
Thanks to Wahshi, I've my due!”*

Abu Sufyan climbed to the top of the mountain and shouted down: “Good work! It was our turn to win, and today pays you back for Badr. Hubal be exalted!”

Umar shouted back. “Allah is greater! Our dead are in Heaven and yours are in Hell!”

After confirming with Umar that Muhammad had survived, Abu Sufyan challenged: “Meet us again at Badr next year!”

“Yes!” yelled the Muslims. “Appointment!”<sup>28</sup>

Seventy-five Muslims lay dead on the field, along with 23 Meccans. Muhammad was horrified at the sight of his mutilated Uncle Hamza. “If ever I defeat the Quraysh in future,” he said, “I will mutilate thirty of them. Now keep Aunt Safiya away from her

brother's corpse!"

He spoke too late. Aunt Safiya pushed her way past her son Zubayr and insisted on looking at Hamza anyway.

Muhammad prayed over each of them and testified: "Allah will resurrect every man who died for Him, and every wound will bleed red and smell like musk." They were buried where they had fallen in the shadow of Mount Uhud, without being washed, two and three in one shared grave.<sup>29</sup>

### Summary

- Muhammad had made enemies because of the Robbery at Badr, particularly the Quraysh, the Sulaym and the Jews. He assassinated several people who criticised him.
- He ordered a Jewish tribe, the Qaynuqa, to convert to Islam. When they refused, he attacked them, drove them out of Medina and took their property.
- This was the end of the Compact of Medina.
- Muhammad led several raids against the Quraysh, the Sulaym and the Ghatafan; although he committed a few robberies, there was no real fighting.
- The Quraysh army, led by Abu Sufyan, marched to Medina to take revenge for the Robbery at Badr. Abu Sufyan defeated Muhammad's army at Mount Uhud.

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### Notes to Chapter 9: *Poets, Polytheists and Jews*

1 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 365, 675-677. Waqidi (Faizer) 85-87. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:30-31, 35; (Bewley) 3:376. Bukhari 6:60:89; 8:73:226.

2 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 239, 245, 278-279, 391. Waqidi (Faizer) 154. Bukhari 6:60:89; 8:73:226.

3 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 365, 367-368. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 44. Waqidi (Faizer) 92-93. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:35-36. Bukhari 5:59:369. Abu Dawud 19:2994, 2998. Tabari (MacDonald/Watt) 7:94.

4 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 233.

5 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 235. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:293. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:26. Ibn

Kathir (Le Gassick) 2:252, 369.

6 Bukhari 3:40:563; 4:53:324; 5:59:340. Muslim 23:4881, 4879. Abu Dawud 19:2980.

7 Q5:54-55, 59. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 260, 363-364. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 571 #568, 570. Waqidi (Faizer) 87-90. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:32. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:33. Abu Dawud 19:2995. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:87.

8 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 165, 309, 311-314, 316-318, 360. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 740 #384, 741 #399. Waqidi (Faizer) 66, 70-73. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:18; (Bewley) 8:23-24. Muslim 19:4360. Abu Dawud 14:2685. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:88.

9 Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:13-17. Bukhari 3:40:563; 4:53:324, 344; 5:57:55; 5:59:340; 7:64:274; 8:75:330. Muslim 23:4881, 4879; 35:6577. Abu Dawud 19:2980, 2982. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:92. Guillaume (1960) 50.

10 Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:293-294. Bukhari 2:15:71; 7:68:453-480. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:87-88.

11 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 361-362. Waqidi (Faizer) 90. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:33-34. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:89.

12 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 360, 362. Waqidi (Faizer) 90-91, 96-98, 180, 235. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2: 34-35, 39-41, 69. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:88-89. Kister (1965b). Kister (1986).

13 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 330, 365-368. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 752 #576. Waqidi (Faizer) 91-95, 179-180. Bukhari 5:59:369. Abu Dawud 19:2994. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:35-37. Bukhari 3:45:687; 4:52:270, 271; 5:59:369. Muslim 19:4436. Abu Dawud 14:2762; 19:2994. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:94-97. Lubaba was the wife of Uncle Abbas; she was probably not yet 30 years old. Ibn Maslama had been born to the Lion tribe but later joined the Wolves.

14 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 368-369. Waqidi (Faizer) 95-96. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:37, 39. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:41. Abu Dawud 19:2994, 2996. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:97-98.

15 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 364. Waqidi (Faizer) 98-99. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:42. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:98-99.

16 Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:40-41; 8:26. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:98. Guillaume (1960) 52. It is not clear whether Muhammad gave this advice to Ruqayya or to Umm Kulthum; it is possible that he gave the same advice to both of them.

17 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 115-117, 146-148, 214-218 and Suyuti (Jarrett) 112 indicate that there was a severe gender imbalance. *See also* Q4:25 and Bukhari 1:1:1; 1:2:51 for suggestions that men had trouble finding wives. Muslim 42:7085, 7083, 7086, 7084, 7087, 7089, 7092, 7093, 7097, 7098.

18 Q66:4. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 446. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 792 #918. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:203-204, 207; 8:56, 82-83, 152, 296. Bukhari 5:43:648; 5:59:342; 6:60:435; 7:62:55, 60, 75, 119; 7:72:734. Muslim 9:3506, 3507, 3511; 31:6090. Abu Dawud 28:3878. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:105; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:174. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q19:71-72. Guillaume (1960) 53.

19 Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 794 #918. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:82. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 150; (Poonawala) 9:138ff; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:164. Guillaume (1960) 53.

20 Q33:36 (Sahih).

21 Q4:3. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 793 #918. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:72. Tabari (Landau-Tasseron) 39:180. Ibn Kathir's *Tafsir*, Q33:51. Mahalli/Suyuti, *Tafsir* on Q33:36-38.

22 Waqidi (Faizer) 257. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:15, 17-18. Bukhari 4:53:344; 7:64:274; 7:72:733. Abu Dawud 19:2982. It is not known exactly when this happened. Perhaps it was when Muhammad brought some Ghatafan slaves to Medina in November 625; or perhaps it was

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after the defeat of the Qurayza in May 627.

23 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 370-374. Waqidi (Faizer) 99-101, 103-109, 110. Bukhari 3:30:108; 5:59:380. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:105-106, 107-110, 113.

24 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 373-375, 377-379, 383, 389, 427. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 753 #586. Waqidi (Faizer) 103, 108-113, 118. Bukhari 4:52:276; 5:59:322, 375, 396. Abu Dawud 14:2584, 2656. Tirmidhi 3:21:1692; 5:46:3738; *Shamail* 14:104. Ibn Maja 4:24:2806. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:113-114, 118.

25 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 299, 371, 375-377. Waqidi (Faizer) 35-36, 112, 138-139. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:80. Bukhari 5:59:399. Abu Dawud 14:2659. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:33, 106-107, 121-122. In some versions Jubayr's uncle was killed by Hamza himself; in others by Hamza's nephew Ali.

26 Muslim 19:4455. Waqidi (Faizer) 119, 122. Bukhari 5:58:156; 5:59:393. Muslim 19:4455. Aisha was at that time eleven years old.

27 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 377-380, 383. Waqidi (Faizer) 112-116, 118, 135, 138. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:477. Bukhari 4:52:276; 4:54:510; 5:58:156, 161; 5:59:375, 394; 8:78:661; 9:83:22, 28. Muslim 19:4455. Abu Dawud 14:2656. Nasai 1:25:3151. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:113-115, 119-120, 122, 125.

28 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 380-381, 385-387. Waqidi (Faizer) 116-123, 127, 130, 134, 139, 143-144. Bukhari 4:31:3464; 4:52:131, 159, 276; 5:58:156; 5:59:322, 375, 390, 392, 393, 404; 6:60:85; 7:62:175; 7:71:618. Muslim 19:4413, 4414, 4455. Nasai 1:25:3151. Tirmidhi 4:31:3464; 5:44:3002, 3007, 3008, 3129. Ibn Maja 4:31:3465; 5:36:4027. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:120-121, 123, 125-126, 129, 131-132.

29 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 387-388, 401-403. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 756 #613; 759 #635. Waqidi (Faizer) 140-141; 145-151. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:49-51. Bukhari 2:23:427, 429, 431, 436; 4:52:276; 5:59:322, 375, 406. Abu Dawud 20:3132, 3133, 3209. Nasai 3:21:1957, 2004, 2012, 2013, 2017, 2018, 2020. Tirmidhi 2:5:1016, 1036; 3:21:1713; 5:44:3129. Ibn Maja 1:6:1513. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:133-134.

## *Defeated and Destroyer*

**March 625 – September 626**

“Have you ever known a day more terrible than the day of Uhud?” asked Aïsha.

The Battle of Uhud was a calamity for Muhammad and a test of the Muslims’ faith. The myth that Allah would always grant them victory was shattered. Muhammad had to think up an excuse for their humiliating loss.

He blamed the archers. They had abandoned their post of duty because they were greedy for plunder. Victory was only awarded to the virtuous.

*Obey Allah and the Messenger, that you may be shown mercy ... Be not infirm, and be not grieving, and you shall have the upper hand if you are believers. If a wound has afflicted you, a wound like it has also afflicted the people; and We bring these days to men by turns, and that Allah may know those who believe and take witnesses from among you; and Allah does not love the unjust ...*

*What befell you on the day when the two armies met was with Allah’s knowledge, and that He might know the believers and that He might know the hypocrites; and it was said to them: “Come, fight in Allah’s way, or defend yourselves.” They said: “If we knew fighting, we would certainly have followed you.” They were on that day much nearer to unbelief than to belief. They say with their mouths what is not in their hearts, and Allah best knows what they conceal.<sup>1</sup>*

He blamed Abdallah Aowf, who had lured away one-third of his army. On the first Friday after the battle, when the Muslims congregated in the mosque, Abdallah stood up as usual to introduce Muhammad’s sermon. The Muslims seized his robes and

ordered him: "Sit down, you enemy of Allah! After what you did you don't deserve to do this." Abdallah stalked out, stepping over the necks of the prostrating Muslims, muttering, "One would think I had said something terrible in supporting him!" He never introduced Muhammad in the mosque again.

He blamed the Jews. He accused the Nadir tribe of showing the Meccans the way to the gaps in the Muslims' defences. In fact no Jews had been present on the battle-field, and the gaps had opened up quite suddenly, clear and visible to the Quraysh without any help from anyone else. But if the accusation had been true, the Nadir would have broken their compact "never to help Muhammad's enemies".

The Jews were no longer afraid of Muhammad. They once again spoke their opinion openly. "Muhammad is only seeking kingship. A real prophet is never wounded like this!" Obviously they could not have meant that a prophet is immune from normal misfortune; they probably meant that a true prophet would never have provoked such a battle.<sup>2</sup>

The Comrades were now confronted with the reality of their vow to sacrifice their lives for Muhammad. They had borne most of the losses at Uhud, where seventy Comrades had died but only five Immigrants. Abdallah Aowf and his friends were on the look-out for disaffected people. He hinted that it was always possible to leave Islam and worked on weaning them away.

Every "backbiter" who made such remarks, together with every "coward" who had refused to fight for Muhammad, was labelled a "hypocrite". Umar spoke up for a whole faction who wanted to kill all the hypocrites – and all the Jews too. Muhammad had to explain to Umar that the Jews were too powerful to be attacked and that a Muslim must not kill another person who even pretended to be a fellow-Muslim. For everyone else, he produced a prophecy that there was no need to kill anyone, for: "Medina will expel the filth from itself just as fire expels filth from silver."<sup>3</sup>

Muhammad toiled to reinstate his reputation as the invincible warrior, but that summer he only suffered a series of setbacks.

In June he heard a rumour that the Asad tribe was planning to attack Medina. He sent 150 men to “attack them before they attack you.” If the plot was real, it disintegrated as soon as the Asad heard that the Muslims were coming. They scattered, and the Muslims had no luck in searching for them. All they brought back to Medina was camels, goats and three shepherds. Muhammad took 20% of the animals and divided the rest among the raiders.<sup>4</sup>

At about the same time, he heard that a Hudhayl chief, Khalid al-Lihyani, was forming an army to attack him. Khalid had settled on the Meccan trade-route, where the Muslims were likely to raid again, so the risk was not that Medina might be attacked but that there might be a violent resistance to Muhammad’s next robbery. To deal with the nuisance, Muhammad sent his man Ibn Unays to assassinate Khalid.

Ibn Unays was in a difficult position. He had to kill Khalid. Yet if he reported back to Muhammad that he had not found any evidence of resistance, he would have killed him for no reason. The only report he could realistically bring back was that Khalid really had been plotting to defend the Meccan trade-route, but that Ibn Unays had dealt with the trouble.

He found Khalid with some women in a camel-sedan, surrounded by a band of followers from multiple tribes. The chief welcomed him and hosted him in his tent, a short distance away from his followers. We have only Ibn Unays’s word for whatever they talked about there. As soon as Khalid fell asleep, Ibn Unays stabbed him to death. He cut off his head and, leaving the women wailing in the tent, brought it back to Muhammad.

“I told Khalid that I wanted to join the fight against Muhammad,” he reported, “and he admitted that he was leading it.”<sup>5</sup>

Khalid’s enterprise could not have been at an advanced stage of

preparation, for nobody arose to take over its leadership. Instead of continuing with the plot – which was never heard of again – the Hudhayl tribe avenged Khalid's assassination. They sent to Medina some allies from the Hun tribe who pretended to be interested in Islam. Not suspecting a trick, Muhammad sent back with them ten spies who could teach them about Islam and gather intelligence about the movements of neighbouring tribes.

Out in the Hudhayl territory at Raji Well, the Hun "converts" signalled to their Hudhayl accomplices, and the ten spies found themselves ambushed by a hundred archers. They fought back, and eight of them were killed in the struggle; the two survivors were tied up with bow-strings and taken as prisoners to Mecca. There the Hudhaylites set them for sale for fifty camels each.

This was an exorbitant price, yet some of the Quraysh were willing and able to pay. Everyone knew exactly who had killed whom at Badr, and one Muslim was bought by his victim's nephew. The other had not fought at Badr, so he had not directly wronged the Meccans; but Umayya Juma's son bought him in a kind of vicarious revenge. As soon as the sacred month was over, the two Muslims were roped to wooden stakes and speared to death. With their dying breath they called to Allah to kill every one of their slayers. Their corpses were left out to rot on the stakes for months.<sup>6</sup>

In July Muhammad received a visit from Abu Baraa, high chief of the Kilab tribe and one of the most powerful rulers in Arabia. He wanted help with his fight against his one-eyed nephew Amir. Muhammad was reluctant because the hostile Sulaym tribe lived between the Kilab and Medina. In the end Abu Baraa granted a safe-conduct, and Muhammad sent him forty warriors who would both fight and teach Islam.

The Muslims travelled as far as Mawuna Wells in Sulaym territory. There they were spotted by the one-eyed Amir. He understood at once that these military reinforcements had come to make trouble for himself by assisting his uncle. So he told his allies in the Sulaym



tribe about the arrival of armed Muslims. The Sulaym, seizing on this chance to avenge their relatives who had been killed at Badr, ambushed the Muslims.

The Muslims drew their swords, but they were surrounded and outnumbered. It was a fight to the death. Once again, almost all of the dead were Comrades.

One man, Amru al-Damri, escaped the slaughter because he had been looking after the camels. When he saw his friends lying in their blood and surrounded by warriors, he fled back to Medina. On his journey home, two strangers came to share his shade. As they chatted, he discovered they were from the Kilab tribe. Amru blamed the Kilab for the killing of the Muslims, so he waited until the two men fell asleep and then he killed them.

Amru expected Muhammad to be pleased that he had taken revenge. Instead, Muhammad told him: "That was a wretched deed! I had a pact of mutual protection with the Kilab tribe. Now that you have killed those men, I must pay their blood-money!"<sup>7</sup>

The bad news about the killing of the two Muslims in Mecca arrived on the same day. Muhammad prayed every day for forty days: "O Allah, punish those tribes! Smite them with drought! Protect us from the Hudhayl and Sulaym tribes! Guide the Kilab to Islam! Avenge Abu Baraa's broken promise of protection!"

In due course an apology arrived from Abu Baraa, who was so enraged over his nephew Amir's treachery that he tried to kill him. Nevertheless, Abu Baraa demanded blood-money for the two men whom Amru al-Damri had killed. Abu Baraa did not owe anything to Muhammad, since it was the Sulaym, not the Kilab, who had attacked the Muslims. Muhammad was not powerful enough to confront the whole Sulaym tribe to demand compensation for his forty men;<sup>8</sup> but he still had to pay the Kilab for their two.

Since there was nothing he could do about the Kilab, the Sulaym or the Hudhayl, he decided to get rid of Abu Sufyan.

He sent Amru al-Damri to Mecca with instructions to kill the high chief. Amru entered Mecca with his dagger unsheathed in readiness. He tried to be discreet, but he had a distinctive face and walk. Everyone in Mecca knew him, for he had been a violent, trouble-making rebel before he became a Muslim. On his way to the house, Abu Sufyan's son Muaawiyah recognised him and raised the alarm. "It's Amru al-Damri! He's up to no good!" Amru knew at once that he would never reach Abu Sufyan. He had to run to the mountains and hide in a cave.

The next day a Quraysh man came walking through the mountains, cutting grass to feed to his horse. Amru did not give the man a chance to see him; he ran out and stabbed him in the chest first. The man screamed, but he was dead before his friends could ask where his attacker was.

On his return journey to Medina, Amru was nearly recognised again, this time at the very spot where one of the Muslims had been speared to death. The rotting corpse was still there, hung up on the stake, and Amru decided to rescue it. He managed to untie the corpse and began to carry it away on his back. Then the same men who had recognised him a few minutes earlier ran after him, so he threw the body over a cliff and fled.

Later in his journey, Amru stopped to rest in a cave. An elderly one-eyed shepherd also entered the cave. They chatted and discovered they were both from the Bakr tribe, though from different clans. As they lay down to rest, the elderly shepherd sang to himself:

*"I won't be a Muslim as long as I live  
Nor heed to religion of Islam will give."*

Amru decided to kill the old man "more horribly than any man has ever been killed." He waited until he was asleep and snoring. Then he took his bow, inserted one end into the old man's sound eye and forced it down until it reached his bone. Then he ran, feeling like a beast of prey and a speeding eagle.

Nearer to Medina, he met two Quraysh men. Suspecting that they had been sent to spy on Medina, he ordered them to surrender. They refused, so Amru fired an arrow and killed one of them. The other man then surrendered. Amru tied up his thumbs with his bow-string and took him to Medina. Amru still had to confess that he had bungled his mission; but when Muhammad saw the prisoner, he laughed and blessed the assassin.<sup>9</sup>

Ever since the Battle of Uhud, Muhammad had been campaigning in reaction to real or imagined threats. There was no particular threat from the Jews in Medina; but their general opposition to Islam was a constant irritation. Muhammad knew that he would be stronger if he could weaken the Jews.

In August he took eight friends to visit the Nadir quarter and asked Huayy to give him the blood-money that he owed to Abu Baraa. He probably only asked because he expected Huayy to say no, hence giving him an excuse to punish the Nadir.

Instead, Huayy said, "Of course! Sit down and we'll bring you some food." The Muslims sat outside, leaning against a wall, to wait for the money. Suddenly Muhammad jumped up and told his friends, "Don't go – I'll be right back." They waited for a long time. When they finally realised that he had gone home without them, they had no idea of his reason.

Back in Medina, Abu Bakr asked what had happened. Muhammad replied: "The Jews were plotting to kill me. Huayy said they would never have such a convenient opportunity again. A man named Ibn Jihash climbed up to the roof and was about to drop a rock on top of me, but I was warned from Heaven just in time."

Neither Muhammad nor his friends had seen or heard anything of a plot to kill him: if they had, they would not have needed a warning from Heaven or been surprised over Muhammad's hasty departure. The only evidence of a plot was Muhammad's word that "Allah told me".<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, he sent Ibn Maslama – the man who had killed Kaab Nadir – with a message for the Nadir tribe.

“You know what you did yesterday ...” He “reminded” them of their plot to assassinate Muhammad. “So this is what the Prophet says. ‘Leave my homeland. You shall not live here because your treachery has broken our compact. You have ten days. Anyone who is still here after that time will be beheaded.’”

At first the Nadir were stunned into silence. Then they exclaimed: “Ibn Maslama, we did not think that a Wolf would ever bring us such a wicked message!”

“Hearts have changed,” he replied. “Islam has wiped out the old loyalties.”

At first they agreed to leave; but while they were packing, they received a message from Abdallah Aowf, high chief of the Lions.

Don’t go! Stand firm and defend yourselves in your fortress. I have 2,000 men in my tribe as well as allies from other tribes, and we will not abandon you. The Qurayza are sure to support you too, and so will your Ghatafan allies. We’ll die to the last man before we let Muhammad reach you.

So the Nadir tribe shut themselves in their fortress. They had a continuous water-supply and enough food to last a year, and they assumed Muhammad would give up in much less time than that. Huayy sent word to Muhammad that they had no intention of leaving Medina and to Abdallah Aowf that his promised assistance would be urgently required.<sup>11</sup>

Muhammad responded: “Allah is greater! The Jews have chosen war!” He ordered his army to march against the Nadir.

The Muslim army arrived in the Nadir town-square. Muhammad demanded yet another new treaty (a frank admission that this attack was a breach of the old one) and when they refused, the army attacked the fortress. The Nadir climbed up to their ramparts and fired arrows and stones until darkness fell. The Muslims continued to attack the castle, shouting, “Allah is greater!”

throughout the night.

The next morning Muhammad abandoned the siege. He siphoned off part of his army and went instead to attack the Qurayza quarter. He demanded that they promise never to support Muhammad's enemies. Kaab, chief of the Qurayza, probably had no idea who Muhammad's current enemies were; but he saw the army and agreed to what Muhammad wanted. The terms of this new contract were somewhat vague and informal, but Kaab pledged himself as surety for the loyalty of his whole tribe. Then Muhammad returned to the assault on the Nadir.

It must have been very soon afterwards that Kaab Qurayza received Abdallah Aowf's message that the Nadir were in trouble and they must mount an armed relief. It was too late. "I gave my word," said Kaab. "Not a single man from the Qurayza tribe will break the contract as long as I live."

This was not the only way in which Abdallah had underestimated the growing power of Islam in Medina. He discovered that he no longer had 2,000 Lions and Wolves loyal to his call. Huge numbers of them had chosen to fight on Muhammad's side instead, including his own son. Perhaps he made an effort to call up the Ghatafan and other tribes beyond Medina to help the Nadir; but if he did, they never came.

By the end of the second day, the Nadir gave up all hope that anybody might come to their relief. Huayy was philosophical: "It is the trial that was written for us." A few of the Jews ventured out to try guerrilla tactics on the besiegers – one of them nearly shot Muhammad in the face – but Ali tracked them down and cut off all their heads. For most of the time, the Nadir remained in their fortress, while Muhammad continued the siege.<sup>12</sup>

On the seventh day Gabriel gave Muhammad a new prophecy: Allah forbade all Muslims to drink alcohol.<sup>13</sup> This was presumably because some of them had been drinking on duty. Sieges were boring and, as Huayy had predicted, Muhammad did not want to

take a year over this one.

Around the thirteenth day, Muhammad ordered that some date-palm trees that were visible from the fortress window should be destroyed. The second-rate trees were cut down to their stumps and burned, then the Muslims hacked the prime dates down from their branches. At this the Nadir women tore their gowns, slapped their cheeks and cried out in affliction. Muhammad smiled over their anguish and asked, "What is wrong with those women? They are just dates!"

The Nadir became frightened. This was their livelihood: it would take thirty years for new trees to reach maturity. Huayy challenged Muhammad: "You used to forbid the wanton destruction of the environment. Why are you cutting down our trees?"

"This wasn't ordinary destruction," said Muhammad. "Allah gave a special command to cut down those trees as a punishment for your sins."

"We will give you what you ask! We will leave your land!"

"I will no longer accept your surrender on those terms," replied Muhammad. The truth was, he was considering whether it was practicable to kill all of them.

*And had it not been that Allah had decreed for them the exile,  
He would certainly have punished them in this world, and in the  
hereafter they shall have chastisement of the fire.*<sup>14</sup>

He soon decided against this. He must have realised that if he wiped them out he would make enemies, for the Nadir were well-liked both in Medina and beyond. Instead, he conditioned that they must leave Medina and go to live in Syria, taking only as many possessions as one camel between every three of them could carry. He would keep all their land, trees, weapons and anything else they left behind.<sup>15</sup>

On the morning of the fifteenth day Huayy finally announced the surrender of the Nadir.

The Nadir called in their debts and loaded their camels, all supervised by the henchman Ibn Maslama, who had been tasked with expelling them. Determined to leave as little as possible for the Muslims, some of the men tore apart their houses with their own hands and loaded even the lintels of their doors onto their camels.

In this period Muhammad broke his side of the bargain, for there was a man whom he wanted dead. He asked a Jew who had just converted to Islam, "Have you seen how Ibn Jihash plotted to kill me?" The convert took the hint and paid a Bedouin assassin ten gold coins. The Bedouin lay in wait for Ibn Jihash and killed him. The convert reported to Muhammad, who was pleased.

Among the Nadir lived several children from Comrade families. This was because some polytheists had tried to appease the Jews' God by dedicating their children to permanent fosterage in Jewish families. Now that the natural parents had converted to Islam, they worried that their children were about to be taken to a Jewish community where they would never hear about Allah or His prophet. Muhammad had no interest in starting a custody battle. He told the natural parents not to worry, for the truth of Islam was so obvious that their children were bound to recognise it. Trying to force conversions would be a waste of effort.

*There is no compulsion in religion; truly the right way has become clearly distinct from error.*<sup>16</sup>

On the day appointed for departure, the Nadir refused to acknowledge their status as a defeated tribe forced into exile. They paraded through the town, right across the Qaynuqa Bazaar. The men marched beside their 600 laden camels, followed by singing-girls playing pipes and beating tambourines. Inside the sedans, the women sat unveiled to flaunt their famous beauty, dressed in silk and velvet and brocade, dyed with red and green and saffron, adorned with gold bracelets and pearl necklaces. It was also rumoured that they had managed to hide away some of their

weapons from Ibn Maslama's grasp.

People lined up to gape at their magnificent display. Muhammad could not stop the "hypocrites" pouring out their sympathy for the Nadir. They kept saying things like, "This is an evil day for Medina," and, "They gave help and hospitality to everyone and bore all insults patiently," and, "You are the lighted lanterns who fed and watered all of us!" all with a happy disregard for how Muhammad felt about it.

Most of the Nadir did not in fact go to Syria. Huayy's cousin Abu Rafi called out as they exited Medina: "Life has ups and downs! We're leaving our date-palms here to go to our other trees in Khaybar!" Khaybar, a Jewish city only three days' journey north of Medina, was where they stopped. The people there not only welcomed them but asked Abu Rafi to become their high chief.<sup>17</sup>

Muhammad did not divide the Nadir land and weapons equally among his warriors because he had acquired them without any actual fighting. Therefore, he said, Allah had granted them exclusively to Muhammad as his personal property. He was generous in sharing some of it out among the Immigrants, but he kept seven date-orchards for himself. He planted them with barley and dates, and they produced enough food to support his whole extended family. Anything left over was spent on horses and weapons for the next *jihad* or given away as charity.

Muhammad was no longer a poor man. His family had more financial security than they had enjoyed since the boycott in Mecca. He had also made the Immigrants land-owners over an even larger area of Medina.<sup>18</sup>

His wife Zaynab died in early October 625, just eight months after their marriage.<sup>19</sup> His grandson Abdallah, the only child of Ruqayya, died soon afterwards, after a rooster pecked out his eye.<sup>20</sup>

At that time Muhammad heard a rumour that the Ghatafan tribe, ally of the Nadir, was once again plotting to fight him. He took 400



men to Ghatafan territory to investigate. They searched for the army but all they found was a residential camp at Mount Dhat al-Riqaa. The women were in their tents but every man had escaped to the mountain-peaks.

The Muslims assumed that the men must be nearby, watching for a moment to sweep down on them unexpectedly; but they nevertheless took the women prisoner. As they were rounding up the captives, one Muslim killed a pretty girl. Yet even when the Ghatafan became aware of this, they refused to start the fight.

Despite this, the Muslims were so terrified that Muhammad had to announce a revelation from Allah: the new ritual of the Fear Prayer, whereby half of them prayed and the other half kept watch. When it finally became clear that the battle was not going to happen, the Muslims turned around to go home.

Only at this point was there any reaction from the Ghatafan. The husband of the dead girl swore a bloodthirsty revenge. He pursued the Muslims' homeward trail and eventually overtook them at a mountain gorge. One man was standing watch at the entrance, and the Ghatafanite fired an arrow at him. The watchman calmly pulled out the arrow and dropped it. The Ghatafanite hit him twice more, and each time the watchman pulled out and dropped the arrow. Then he finished the verse of the Quraan that he had been reciting and alerted his watch-partner. The Ghatafanite knew he was rumbled and he ran off into the night.<sup>21</sup>

After this expedition Muhammad did not fight again for six months. The deaths of 75 warriors at Uhud caused several families to ask about their inheritance rights, and Muhammad was kept busy devising a raft of legislation on family matters.

Marriage was under discussion. A Muslim widow waited at home for four months and ten days before she could consider remarriage. This was partly to give her grieving time but was more importantly to ascertain paternity if she were pregnant.

The Battle of Uhud had left dozens of widows, who all became eligible to remarry on 1 August. Yet there were still not enough women to marry all the single men; the widows were snapped up by the suitors who could afford generous dowers. For example, Musaab Abdaldar, who had first taught the Quraan in Medina, had been killed at Uhud. His widow married Talha, a fantastically wealthy bachelor who had survived his Uhud wounds.

Muhammad's advice to a poor bachelor was to marry a slave, whose dower would be cheaper, provided she was a good Muslim and her master gave permission.<sup>22</sup>

Theology developed too. Muhammad warned: "Heaven is nearer to any of you than your sandal-strap, and so is Hell." To the list of sins that transformed a Muslim into an unbeliever, Muhammad added murdering a non-Muslim ally without paying blood-money, divorcing one's husband without an excellent reason, addiction to wine and having a speck of pride in one's heart. On the other hand, no person with a speck of Islamic faith would remain in Hell forever.

Muhammad never explained would happen to a person who had both a speck of pride and a speck of faith together. For ordinary Muslims, it must have been nearly impossible to keep track of whether their balance of sins, good works, penances and penitence qualified them as believers or unbelievers day to day. Dying in the *jihad* was the only certain route to Heaven. Otherwise they had no security about what would happen to them after they died; their fiery punishment might be short, long or permanent.<sup>23</sup>

Early in 626 men all over Medina were discussing the beauty of Umm Salama, a petite widow of 28 with long, thick plaits wound around her head. Originally from the aristocratic Makhzum clan in Mecca, she was an energetic businesswoman who supported a household of four children and six servants by tanning hides, carding wool and selling the produce of her date-orchard. Her husband had been wounded at Uhud but he had seemed to recover

before dying of it several months later.

Abu Bakr, Umar and Muhammad each proposed marriage to Umm Salama, but she was still grieving for her first husband and she refused them all. She refused Muhammad a second time; but when he insisted that her objections were invalid, she accepted his third proposal. Her household moved into the mosque at the end of March. However, it was several days before he could coax her into consummating their marriage, for she was so busy with her baby that she had no time for her bridegroom. After the baby was sent away to a wet-nurse, Umm Salama did her duty.

Despite this lukewarm beginning, Umm Salama grew to love Muhammad and became a favourite among his wives. Aïsha was sick with jealousy.<sup>24</sup>

All Muhammad's wives hoped to bear a son for the Prophet; but all were disappointed. Aïsha had still not reached puberty while Saowda at about this time passed menopause. Hafsa and Umm Salama, who had borne children to their previous husbands, were mysteriously barren for Muhammad.

His daughter Umm Kulthum was also childless. Nor could he hope for any more grandchildren through Zaynab, for he was still keeping her separated from her husband. Her son, the second Ali, died in Medina while he was still small enough to be carried.

Zaynab's daughter, Umama, captured Muhammad's grandfatherly affections. He would carry her into prayers, putting her down at every prostration then picking her up whenever he arose. He teased his wives by promising an onyx necklace "to the one I love best". He gave them time to whisper that he meant Aïsha before presenting it to Umama and tenderly wiping something from her eye. Another time he gave her a gold ring set with a carnelian.

Only Fatima was perpetuating the family effectively. She gave birth to Hassan nine months after her wedding, to Hussayn ten months after Hassan, to Zaynab a year after Hussayn and to Umm

Kulthum a year after Zaynab. A fifth child, Muhassin, died in infancy, perhaps stillborn. Hence arose the pious myth that Fatima the Radiant never in her life menstruated.<sup>25</sup>

Ali and Fatima had a stormy relationship, and Muhammad was constantly mediating between “the two whom I love most”. If Ali was angry, he did not speak a word. He would sprinkle dust on his head and sleep in the mosque courtyard. Then Muhammad would ask, “What’s your problem, Mr Dusty?” Fatima’s approach was more direct. When Ali beat her, she complained to Muhammad. He had advice for both of them. “Listen, Daughter. A clever woman attends to her husband’s affection when he is calm.” Ali had to promise, “I won’t beat her again, or anything else that you dislike.”

When Muhammad could not decide how to apportion the blame, he sat down in their house with each of them reclining against him. He took both their hands and heard them out until he had made peace between them. However, when Ali wanted to take a second wife, he was clearly in the wrong. He had proposed to Mr Stupid’s daughter, who was still a polytheist, and the daughter of Allah’s enemy could not live beside the daughter of Allah’s Prophet. Muhammad preached from the pulpit that he forbade the match “for what hurts Fatima hurts me.”<sup>26</sup>

Abu Sufyan had promised another battle at Badr, so the Muslims prepared their weapons. A man returning from Mecca asked: “Why are you bothering? Last time your friends were killed and Muhammad himself was wounded. Abu Sufyan is assembling a huge army, including his Bedouin allies ...”

The Muslims were so frightened by his descriptions of the huge Meccan army with its deadly weapons and new equipment that they began to make excuses to avoid fighting. Muhammad had to remind them of the commercial opportunities at Badr’s annual trade-fair and finally told them, “I shall go to Badr even if I have to go alone.”

So the Muslims suppressed their fears and gathered their merchandise. In April 626 Muhammad set out with 1,500 men, his largest army so far. He left Abdallah Aowf's son as his governor in Medina, a pointed message to the father. At Badr the Muslims found that they were over half of the visitors to the fair. They sold their goods and they all made 100% profit on their investment.

However, although they camped there for all eight nights of the trade-fair, Abu Sufyan never arrived. As one Muslim poet jeered:

*Though Abu Sufyan war averred,  
he did not fight but broke his word.  
If you had fought and had not lied,  
you would have lost, you would have died.*

The Muslims did not know that Abu Sufyan had invented and circulated the rumours of his "great army that they will not be able to withstand" in the hopes that the Muslims would be too afraid to fight him. "I'd rather," he said, "that they broke the contract than we did." He had even made a show of setting out with an army of 2,000 men and 50 horses; but he had only marched a few hours before declaring that he had changed his mind. His excuse was that the weather had been so dry that not enough grass had grown to support a whole army's camels, so they must wait for a greener year.

It was more likely that Abu Sufyan had realised that he could not defeat Muhammad just by winning a "best of three" match as if this were a game. Rather than waste lives and money on a pitched battle, Abu Sufyan was strategising to win. Visitors from all the surrounding tribes had told him that they wanted to join his army and launch a shared attack against Muhammad, so he began to form a multi-tribe confederacy against Medina itself.<sup>27</sup>

Muhammad became busy with a different venture. Merchant-caravans to Syria had to pass through Dumat al-Jandal, an ancient trading city on the border-lands that belonged to the Kalb tribe. In August 626 Muhammad heard that a gang of bandits had gathered

there to attack the caravans. Since the Kalb were having no success in controlling the highwaymen, they were obviously a soft target. So Muhammad decided that he would attack Dumat al-Jandal too.

It was ambitious project. If Muhammad succeeded in conquering such a distant city, he had no way of governing it or collecting taxes from it, and he had enough challenges closer to home; but perhaps he did not really expect to succeed at this stage. The pillage would keep his men busy, and it never hurt to draw attention to the size of his army. He had been told that any military threat at Dumat al-Jandal would alarm the Roman Emperor, which might be useful to him in the future.

He took 1,000 men, who marched by night and hid by day, moving so swiftly that they covered the fifteen-day journey in just eleven nights. Nobody noticed their progress; they managed to take the city completely by surprise. They checked the location of the pasture-lands then descended on the sheep and cattle, capturing as many animals as they could, while the herdsmen ran for their lives.

By the time the Muslims reached the city proper, there was no human being in sight. The citizens, as soon as they heard about the cattle-raid, had dispersed to the hills. Muhammad stayed in Dumat al-Jandal for several days, sending out expeditions to search for the people. The Muslims stole plenty of camels, but only the ruffian Ibn Maslama managed to bring back a human prisoner. The captive could not give them any information about his neighbours; but after several days of being told about Islam, he agreed to convert.

When it was clear that there would be no fighting, Muhammad returned to Medina.<sup>28</sup>

### **Summary**

- Muhammad sent military assistance to the Kilab high chief, but the Sulaym tribe massacred his delegation. Muhammad never demanded compensation because he was not powerful enough

to challenge the Sulaym.

- He attacked the most powerful Jewish tribe, the Nadir, and forced them to leave Medina. He took their property while they settled in nearby Khaybar.
- He tried to assassinate Abu Sufyan but the attempt failed.
- Muhammad's army threatened Dumat al-Jandal, a city on the border of Syria, but there was no fighting.

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**References and Notes to *Chapter 10: Defeated and Destroyer***

1 Q3:132, 139-140, 166-167a (Shakir).

2 Q3:166-167a (Shakir). Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 372, 377-380, 383, 391-393. Waqidi (Faizer) 113-115, 138, 153-154. Bukhari 4:52:276; 4:54:454; 5:59:375. Muslim 19:4425. Abu Dawud 14:2656. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:113-115. Kister (1964).

3 Q4:88. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 391, 403. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 759 #635. Waqidi (Faizer) 145-148, 153-154. Bukhari 3:30:108; 4:52:276; 5:59:322, 375, 380, 405; 6:60:113. Tirmidhi 5:44:3008, 3028, 3129.

4 Waqidi (Faizer) 166. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:59. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 3:83.

5 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 666. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 789 #906. Waqidi (Faizer) 261-262. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:60-61. Abu Dawud 4:1244.

6 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 426-428. Waqidi (Faizer) 173-177. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:66-68. Bukhari 4:52:281; 5:59:325, 412. Abu Dawud 20:3106. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:143-147.

7 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 265, 432-436. Waqidi (Faizer) 167-172, 178. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:61-65, 69. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:34. Bukhari 5:59:405, 417, 419. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:151-153, 156. Caskel (1960-2007). Kister (1965b). Some sources say that there were 70 victims; but only 16 are known by name, three of whom were Immigrants.

8 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 436, 437. Waqidi (Faizer) 170-171, 178. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:62-64. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:155, 156.

9 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 673-675. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 790-791 #913. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:115-117. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:147-150.

10 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 265, 437. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 762 #680. Waqidi (Faizer) 177-179. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:68-69. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:34-35. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:156-157. *See also* Rashid (Anthony) 44-45 for an alternative story in which Muhammad claimed to have forestalled a Jewish plot to kill him.

11 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 265, 437. Waqidi (Faizer) 178-180. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:69. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:34. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:158. *See* Guillaume's footnote 1 to Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 437.

12 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 240, 437, 453. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 45. Waqidi (Faizer) 180-182. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:69-70, 95. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:34. Abu Dawud 19:2998. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:158-161.

13 Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 762 #680.

14 Q59:3 (Shakir).

15 Q59:3-5. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 437-439. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 43, 45-46. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 762 #681. Waqidi (Faizer) 182-184. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:70-71. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:34-36. Bukhari 3:39:519; 4:52:263; 5:59:365, 366; 6:60:406. Muslim 19:4324, 4325, 4326, 4364. Abu Dawud 19:2998, 2999. Tirmidhi 3:19:1552; 5:44:3302. Ibn Maja 4:24:2845. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:156, 159-160.

16 Q2:256 (Shakir).

17 Q59:3. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 437-439, 519. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 46. Waqidi (Faizer) 183-185, 192, 332. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:70-71, 131-132. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:34-35. Abu Dawud 14:2676; 19:2998; 14:2676. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:35. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:159-160. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q2:256.

18 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 438-439. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 47. Waqidi (Faizer) 185-187. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:70-71. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:33, 34, 37. Bukhari 4:52:153; 4:53:379; 6:60:407; 7:64:270. Muslim 19:4347. Abu Dawud 19:2959, 2961, 2998. Nasai 5:38:4145. Tirmidhi 3:21:1719.

19 Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 794 #918. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:82. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:150 f 215, 216; (Poonawala) 9:138ff; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:163-164. Dhahabi 2 #113. Ibn Hajar, *Isaba* 7 #11230. Guillaume (1960) 53, 55.

20 Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:38-39; 8:25. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:161. Guillaume (1960) 49.

21 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 445-447. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 763 #688. Waqidi (Faizer) 194-195. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:74-75. Abu Dawud 1:198. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:162-164.

22 Q2:221, 234-235; 4:2-12, 25. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 201, 401. Malik 29:29:83. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 792-794 #918. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:87-93, 163-166. Abu Dawud 18:2885. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q4:11, 25.

23 Bukhari 4:53:352, 391; 8:76:495; 9:93:549, 555. Muslim 1:166. Abu Dawud 12:2218; 14:2514, 2754. Nasai 5:45:4751, 4752. Tirmidhi 2:8:1187; 4:1:1998. Ibn Maja 4:30:3376.

24 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 146, 164. Malik 16:14:42. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 793 #918. Waqidi (Faizer) 185-186. Ibn Hanbal (Cairo) 6#26681. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:583; (Bewley) 8:55-56, 61-67, 81. Bukhari 5:59:613, 617; 7:62:162; 7:72:775. Bukhari, *Mufrad* 9:184. Muslim 3:643; 4:1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2007; 26:5415, 5416; 31:6091; 32:6186. Abu Dawud 9:1559; 30:3921. Tirmidhi 1:2:381. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:167; (Poonawala) 9:132, 145; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:175. Wahidi (Guezzou) on Q49:11. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 3:123-124; 4:480. Guillaume (1960) 53. *Umm Salama* was a teknonym; her personal name was Hind.

25 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 316-317, 490. Malik 9:24:84. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:152; (Bewley) 3:307; 8:21, 26-28, 149, 163-164. Bukhari 1:9:495; 3:48:805, 829; 5:59:462; 9:93:474, 540. Muslim 4:1107, 1940, 2008; 8:3451; 37:6673. Abu Dawud 2:2130; 34:4223. Nasai 3:21:1869. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:142, 161; (Poonawala) 9:39, 132. Tabrizi (Ayoub/Clarke) 234. Dhahabi 3:500. Ibn Hajar, *Isaba* 7 #10176. Guillaume (1960) 50. *Cf* Bukhari 8:73:151 with Abu Dawud 42:4914. *See also* Bukhari 2:15:70.

26 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 286. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:18. Bukhari 5:57:76; 7:62:157. Muslim 31:6001. Abu Dawud 11:2064.

27 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 447-448. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 763 #692. Waqidi (Faizer) 188-190. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:71-73. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:165-166.

28 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 449. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 764 #695. Waqidi (Faizer) 197-198. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:76. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:97. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:4-5. Veccia Vaglieri (1960-2007).



## *Confederates of the Ditch*

**September 626 – May 627**

One autumn day, Muhammad paid a call on his son Zayd, and a gust of wind blew aside the hairskin curtain that served as the front door. Muhammad had a sudden brilliant glimpse of one of Zayd's wives, Zaynab, sitting half-dressed. As she arose to greet him, Muhammad saw that she was small, shapely and fair-skinned. Although he had known her all her life, he had never before seen her exposed flesh. Her beauty stunned him motionless.

Zaynab explained as she pulled on her over-gown that Zayd had gone out but that Muhammad was welcome to visit anyway. He hardly heard her. He kept exclaiming, "Praise be to Allah, Who turns hearts around!" By the time Zaynab was dressed, Muhammad had departed, completely infatuated with her.

Zaynab told Zayd, and the dutiful Zayd offered to divorce her so that Muhammad could have her. Muhammad said the correct thing: "No, fear Allah and keep your wife." In secret, however, he was hoping was that they would divorce so that he could marry her.

Zaynab had never liked Zayd much. She was thrilled to realise that Muhammad finally desired her and she decided to make misery for Zayd. She insulted him verbally. She boasted that she was a Quraysh while he was only a freed slave. She refused to have sex with him. As she had hoped, Zayd soon had enough of her. He ignored Muhammad's half-hearted protests and divorced her anyway.

Zaynab had to wait three months before she could marry anyone else. Over that three-month period, Muhammad announced a series of new prophecies. First Allah told him:

*Allah has not ... made those whom you assert to be your sons*

*your real sons; these are the words of your mouths; and Allah speaks the truth and He guides to the way. Assert their relationship to their fathers; this is more equitable with Allah.*<sup>1</sup>

*Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the Last of the prophets.*<sup>2</sup>

Adoption no longer held any legal status in Islam. Zayd was no longer known as Muhammad's son but reverted to his original name "Zayd ibn Haritha". Therefore Zaynab was not Muhammad's ex-daughter-in-law.

Next Allah issued a special concession for Muhammad. The limit of four wives no longer applied to him; unlike other Muslims, he was allowed to have as many wives as he liked.

*O Prophet! surely We have made lawful to you your wives ... and a believing woman if she gave herself to the Prophet, if the Prophet desired to marry her – specially for you, not for the believers.*<sup>3</sup>

When Aisha heard about this, she said, "Allah is very quick to grant your desires!"

On 27 March 627, the same day that Zaynab's three months ended, Allah informed Muhammad:

*When Zayd had accomplished his want of her, We gave her to you as a wife, so that there should be no difficulty for the believers in respect of the wives of their adopted sons.*<sup>4</sup>

"Good news!" he exclaimed. "Allah has married me to Zaynab! Who will go and tell her?" While Aisha fretted over all she had heard about Zaynab's beauty, Zayd hurried to tell Zaynab that she was now the Prophet's wife.<sup>5</sup>

Zaynab was then about 37 years old. Muhammad remained both fascinated and frustrated by her for the rest of his life, for she had true artistic temperament. She was a skilled tanner, dyer and seamstress, who generously gave away all her profits to the poor.

She had a fiery temper and she used to boast to the other wives of how Allah had personally arranged her marriage. She was a seductress, and Muhammad often left his other wives to sleep with her. Though she competed hard, Zaynab never managed to overtake Aïsha in Muhammad's love; but everyone knew that she was his second-favourite wife.<sup>6</sup>

Just one day after their wedding, messengers from the Khuza'a tribe arrived. The Khuza'a lived in Mecca but they resented the Quraysh. Their messengers had raced from Mecca to inform Muhammad that all his enemies had united against him. An army of 10,000 would invade Medina in less than a week.

Muhammad consulted the community at once. Should they go out to meet this huge army in a pitched battle? Nobody wanted another defeat like Uhud. Their chances would not be much better if they tried to defend the city from the fortresses. After some discussion, Salman, a freed slave from Persia, volunteered: "When we were besieged in Persia, we built a ditch around the city. Do you think we should dig a ditch around Medina?"

The Muslims liked this idea. With no time to lose, they went straight out to the city-edge, where Muhammad drew the outline for the ditch and assigned each 20-metre strip to a group of ten men. The Qurayza Jews lent them baskets, shovels and hoes.

Every able-bodied man of every rank and clan was needed if they were to excavate a large enough ditch before the enemy army arrived. Any men who were not digging were carrying earth away on baskets on their heads, and children were helping them. After tipping the soil, they brought rocks from the mountain, which they lined up in front of the Ditch to be used as weapons. It was said that Salman the Persian did the work of ten men.

Muhammad, covered with dust, was carrying baskets along with the rest. When there were not enough baskets to go around, Abu Bakr and Umar, always together, carried the earth away in their robes. Muhammad kept up the workers' spirits by chanting:

*The only life is Paradise,  
may Allah all our sins excise!*

To this the Muslims responded:

*Our pledge we to Muhammad give  
to fight jihad as long we live.*

They kept working until the Ditch lay all around the city to the height of a man. They finished it in six days.

That night Muhammad sent the women and children to the fortresses and appointed a blind man as governor over Medina. He called up all the rest to the army, which numbered 3,000 warriors. He would not allow any boys under fifteen to fight but he let them serve as auxiliaries at first. He pitched a round leather tent in front of the Ditch and set up camp there. He gave the Immigrants' standard to his ex-son Zayd and the Comrades' standard to Saad, chief of the Saïda clan of the Lion tribe.

The Qurayza Jews had helped to dig the ditch but they did not join Muhammad's army, and nor did he expect them to. They had only promised him to be neutral.<sup>7</sup>

The Confederate Army arrived before dawn and set up camp behind the Ditch. Their high commander was Abu Sufyan, but the Quraysh were less than half the army, for he had enlisted the help of all his traditional allies: the Bakr, the Harith, the Hun, the Mustaliq, the Sulaym, the Ghatafan, the Asad and more, to say nothing of 300 horses and 1,500 camels. Also with them were Huayy, exiled chief of the Nadir Jews, who wanted to bring his tribe back to Medina to reclaim their stolen fortresses and date-orchards; and Haowza, head of the Wail family, who were the last polytheistic family left in Medina. All these tribes had sworn to stick together to fight Muhammad until he was dead and his movement was destroyed.

The Ditch was a great success. It was wider than any horse could leap, and the Confederates realised very quickly that they could not

cross it. Their original plan of charging into the city and killing every Muslim in sight was thwarted.

There was still one way to enter Medina. The Muslims had not bothered digging the Ditch in front of any part of the city that was protected by fortress walls. Anyone could easily enter through a fortress door, if someone inside was willing to open it. Abu Sufyan was counting on the Qurayza tribe to open their front door to their old ally Huayy Nadir.

Kaab Qurayza was afraid when Huayy knocked on his door. He did not even want to let him in until Huayy accused him of being too mean to feed him a bowl of porridge. Once Huayy was inside the fortress, Kaab protested that he could not break his contract with Muhammad, for Muhammad “keeps his promises consistently; he protects us and does not expose us to any danger.” Actually the only danger to which the Qurayza might have been “exposed” was from Muhammad himself, so what Kaab really meant was that Muhammad kept his threats and the Qurayza would be destroyed if they annoyed him. Unlike Huayy, Kaab could not leave Medina, “for my wealth and family are here. So your plan is not useful to me.”

Yet of course Kaab understood the usefulness of getting rid of Muhammad. The Qurayza had been living in fear, for they had no trust that Muhammad would keep his side of the bargain. As for the morals of the contract: Muhammad had forced them into it unfairly; and it was so informal and so vaguely worded that in fact it was not clear what they had promised him. In addition, Kaab did not want to fight the Confederated Army, who had never been his enemies, and he knew that they did not want to fight him. When Huayy wheedled and cajoled that the Confederates were too powerful to lose the battle, that they would not give up until Muhammad was dead, that they just needed a little help from their friends, Kaab was persuaded. He promised Huayy to take no more notice of his deal with Muhammad.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, Kaab did not invite the Confederated Army to enter Medina through the Qurayza front door, which was the one thing that would have really helped them. Abu Sufyan had to look for ways to jump the Ditch. Despite this, Muhammad noticed Kaab's lack of enthusiasm for the defence, so he sent some of the Comrade chiefs to ask the Qurayza about their intentions.

Kaab declared openly: "We have no contract or promise with Muhammad." When the Muslims reminded him that they had made a deal in the past, Kaab told them: "We will never return to that. I have cut it the way I cut my sandal-straps."

The conversation became heated. Saad Nabit, high chief of the Wolves, was rude to Kaab, and Kaab insulted Saad back. Saad's cousin Usayd Nabit warned that Muhammad could punish them like the Qaynuqa and the Nadir, and Kaab claimed that he was not afraid of military threats.

When they reported back to Muhammad that he should not trust Kaab, he exclaimed: "Allah is greater! Be happy, for Allah gives victory and He is enough for us."<sup>9</sup>

For many days the two armies faced each other on opposite sides of the Ditch without acting. There was no real fighting. The Muslims kept patrolling the Ditch to make sure nobody managed to cross it. The Confederated Army also kept patrolling it, looking for a spot that might be narrow enough to plunge across if the Muslim watchmen dropped their guard.

One night the Muslims shot arrows and hurled stones at Abu Sufyan's men until the cavalry gave up; they were firing at such close quarters that the stones were the most effective weapons.

Another day Khalid, the Meccan cavalry-commander, lined up a hundred horsemen right opposite Muhammad's tent. They fired a volley of arrows, one archer aiming straight at Muhammad's helmet, and the Muslims fired back; but nobody was hurt before Khalid called a retreat.

Muhammad found one gap in the Ditch that looked dangerously narrow and he watched it until he was exhausted. Salman the Persian agreed that a horse might be able to clear that space, so the men stayed up all night to dig it out to the width of the rest of the Ditch.

Despite the lack of real danger, Muhammad's army was intimidated by the Confederate horses endlessly galloping around from one end of the Ditch to the other, always dispersing and re-grouping, so that the Muslims felt overwhelmed from all directions. The weather was freezing, and food supplies were low. They began to worry about imaginary dangers for which they had no evidence.

It was rumoured that the Qurayza might besiege the women and children in the fortresses or attack the back of the Muslim army. The Muslims became more frightened of the Jews than of the Confederates. Muhammad kept reminding them: "Take your weapons because the Qurayza might attack you." The atmosphere of trepidation built up to a constant, overwhelming alarm. "Wild-eyed and with our hearts in their throats," the Muslims complained that "nobody feels safe even going to the toilet."

Muhammad expected the Qurayza to let the Confederated Army into Medina to attack the women and children by night. He sent 500 cavalry into the city to intercept them. Nothing happened. In fact it would have made more sense for an army as large as the Confederates to bypass the women and attack the Muslim army. This never happened either. When Khalid lined up his men to look for a gap in the Ditch, the Muslims were convinced that they were waiting for the Qurayza so that they could all raid Medina together. No Qurazite ever arrived. Abu Bakr used to patrol Medina looking for Jews. He never found any.

Muhammad kept sending spies to check on the Qurayza. One Jew managed to kidnap a Muslim spy, but the spy killed the Jew with his own spade. Another time, the women in the fortress noticed a Jew walking around their grounds. They assumed he was spying

out their weak points; but he could equally well have been surveying defensively for signs of aggression against the Jews. Muhammad's Aunt Safiya handled the situation: she sneaked down to the grounds, crept up behind him and smashed a log down on his head so that he fell dead.

Only once did the Muslims encounter what might have been Jewish aggression. A group of Muslims travelling to the suburbs encountered ten Jews coming from the opposite direction. Each assumed the hostility of the other. The Jews fired arrows first, and the Muslims fired back. The Jews retreated to their fortress, and the Muslims did not follow them. The next day the Muslims took revenge by destroying a Jewish well.<sup>10</sup>

After a couple of weeks of this war without battles, Muhammad tried to buy off Pop-Eye,\* high chief of the Ghatafan. He offered him one-third of Medina's date-harvest if they would go home, preferably taking a few other tribes with them, and his son-in-law Uthman wrote out the proposed contract.

Before it could be signed, Saad Nabit and Saad Saïda protested. They were the owners of the dates, and they refused to give away their livelihood as a bribe: "We will fight until Allah decides the outcome." They spat on the contract and tore it up, exclaiming, "Let them do their worst!"

"Go!" Muhammad told Pop-Eye. "We are at war!"<sup>11</sup>

At last a group of Confederates found a narrow point on the Ditch that the Muslims had overlooked. Five of them whipped their horses to a gallop through it and managed to land on the swampy ground on the Medina side. Ali immediately brought out a squad to guard the point against anyone else who tried to cross, and the five horsemen charged to meet them.

A Quraysh veteran challenged the Muslims to single combat. Ali

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\* The chief's real name was Hudhayfa ibn Hisn and his nickname in Arabic was *Ujayna*.



was the only volunteer. They circled each other on foot, raising so much dust that the witnesses could not see what was happening. They heard swords strike shields and then a shout of, "Allah is greater!" Ali had killed the old warrior.

The other four Quraysh found themselves exposed to the Muslim army. Their horses fled, and three of them escaped back the way they had come. One horse rolled over in the Ditch, and Muhammad's cousin Zubayr slashed it into two halves. The Muslims threw stones at the man until he called, "Death would be better than this!" So Ali went down to the Ditch to finish him off.

At sunrise the next day the two armies faced each other across the Ditch for the only real battle of the whole war. Arrows were fired all day until hours after dark. Nobody stopped to rest. In the end both armies retreated to their tents, Muhammad assuring the Muslims that they had won, Umar complaining about having missed prayers. Bilal had to call everyone to make-up prayers in the night.

One of the men injured in the exchange of arrows was Saad Nabit, high chief of the Wolves. Being a very large man, he had not found a mail-coat long enough to cover his forearms, and he was shot right in the vein. Saad prayed: "O Allah, let me die as a *shaheed*, but not until the Quraysh and the Qurayza have been defeated!" For the rest of the war, Saad lay in a tent in the mosque, where he could be nursed and where Muhammad visited him twice every day.

After that the only fighting was night-time raids for plunder.<sup>12</sup>

Yet the stalemate was on the point of breaking, for Muhammad had already received a secret visitor. He was Nuwaym,\* a Ghatafanite, who confessed: "I have just become a Muslim and I haven't told anyone. I will obey anything that you order me."

Nuwaym never really justified why Muhammad should trust a man

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\* We are not told how Nuwaym managed to cross the Ditch; he probably came through Kaab Qurayza's door.

who had switched loyalties at the height of a war, but Muhammad had little to lose. He instructed his new friend: "Go and foster distrust among the enemy. Perhaps you can persuade them to abandon the siege."

"I'll have to lie," said Nuwaym.

"Say what you have to say," replied Muhammad. "War is deceit."

Nuwaym lied to everyone. He told Kaab Qurayza, who was a very old friend: "We all oppose Muhammad; but the Quraysh and the Ghatafan don't have the same stake in the problem that you have because they don't have to live in Medina. If anything went wrong, they would abandon you to deal with Muhammad alone. So don't agree to fight with these people unless they give you hostages as security that they really will fight until Muhammad is dead."

Then he told Abu Sufyan and Pop-Eye in turn: "The Qurayza regret breaking their deal with Muhammad and they are trying to negotiate a new treaty. They have told him that if he brings the Nadir back to Medina, they will give him seventy hostages from the Quraysh and Ghatafan whom he can behead. Then they will unite against us and fight until we drop the siege. So if the Jews ask you for hostages, don't send them a single man!"

They all believed him. The Jews told Abu Sufyan to set a date for the grand battle in which they would all attack Muhammad at once and to send hostages as a pledge of their good faith. The Confederates refused to send any hostages. The Jews responded that if there were no hostages, there would be no battle. Nevertheless, no matter how bewildered they all were by the indecisiveness and deceit of their supposed allies, it never occurred to any of them to distrust Nuwaym.<sup>13</sup>

That night the east wind was so fierce that fires were extinguished, cooking-pots were toppled, tents were uprooted, ropes and pegs were swept away, saddles were buried in the sand, and men were riding their camels away in all directions.

Abu Sufyan stood up and said, "O Quraysh, we can't camp here forever. Our horses and camels are starving. The Qurayza have broken their promise and are not going to give us any help. Meanwhile, this wind has taken even our tents and cooking-pots. Depart, for I am leaving!"

Abu Sufyan spoilt his grand exit by mounting his camel in such a hurry that he forgot to un-hobble it, and it jumped up on three legs. He had to let his army pass first. When the Ghatafan saw them marching off, they too broke camp. Huayy Nadir kept his promise to Kaab Qurayza and entered the Qurayza fortress to share their fate.

When the Muslims awoke beside the Ditch on Saturday 21 April, the opposite bank was empty. The whole Confederated Army had disappeared. The war was over.

Nuwaym, who had won the war almost single-handedly, did not receive any special reward for his services. He remained a Muslim, but his name rarely reappears in the records.<sup>14</sup>

Muhammad sent his warriors home and went to Aisha's house to take a bath. Dihya al-Kalbi, a convert from northern Arabia, interrupted him with an urgent warning. Although the Qurayza tribe had not taken any action against the Muslims, they had nevertheless renounced their pact, so they could never be trusted again. It was time to evict them. In a matter of minutes, Dihya convinced Muhammad to attack them immediately.

So Bilal proclaimed that the angel Gabriel (who happened to look exactly like Dihya) had recalled them to *jihad*. Three thousand armed men and 36 horses hurried to Ali's banner. They marched to the Qurayza quarter before dark.

Ali planted the Islamic banner at the foot of the Qurayza fortress. He said that the Jews responded by insulting Muhammad's wives, but they later denied this. Usayd Nabit called, "O enemies of Allah, we will blockade your fortress until you die of starvation. You are

like foxes in their dens.” The Qurayza pleaded their old alliance with the Wolf tribe. Usayd said there was no alliance.

Muhammad then approached in person. “You monkeys, pigs and evil-lovers,” he said, “Allah has disgraced and punished you, hasn’t He? Be very afraid of me!”

He sent his archers forward. Saad Zuhra led the shooting. Their arrows were like a cloud of locusts. They shot until they were worried they would lose all their arrows. The Jews shot back, but they did not come out of their fortress for pitched battle.

Muhammad kept up the shooting for two weeks. The Muslims surrounded the fortress from every direction. Both sides threw stones when there were no arrows. When the Jews saw that the Muslims were remaining close enough to be sure of hitting target, a woman named Nubata heaved down her millstone, which landed on a Muslim warrior and crushed him to death. After that the Muslims became cautious about coming quite so close. Only one other Muslim was killed in the whole battle.<sup>15</sup>

The Muslims were so near to the supplies from their home base that they could keep up the shooting forever. By contrast, the Jewish food supplies would not last forever. The Qurayza realised, with terror, that the Muslims really could starve them out. They sent one of their leaders, Nabbash, to negotiate with Muhammad.

First Nabbash offered to leave Medina quietly like the Nadir, taking only as much as their camels could carry; Muhammad could keep their land and weapons. He refused this deal. Then Nabbash offered to leave even their portable possessions; they would walk away without even taking camels.

“No,” said Muhammad. “If you surrender, I will be the one who decides the terms.”

They knew then that Muhammad meant to destroy them. Kaab Qurayza made a desperate appeal to his tribe.

“O people of Qurayza, we have only three options left. We can

convert to Islam. Or we can kill our women and children and fight, knowing that it won't matter if we lose because we won't leave any survivors. Or, because the Muslims won't expect us to fight on the Sabbath, we can creep down tonight and make a surprise attack. Otherwise, we are doomed."

Naturally the Qurayza rejected the first two suggestions. Huayy approved the third, but Nabbash said it was useless. The Muslims were fighting in shifts, all day and all night, and even the half-armies of each shift outnumbered the Jews two to one. The other Qurayza were too horrified by the blasphemy to consider the practicalities. "No," they shouted, "we won't break the Sabbath!"

"Not one of you has ever done what he knows he ought," Kaab grumbled.

At a loss for any alternative suggestions, the despairing Jews sent for Abu Lubaba, an old Wolf ally. When Muhammad allowed him to visit them, they ran up to him weeping and asking what they should do.

"We were your allies in all the wars," Kaab reminded him. "Now this siege is destroying us. Tell Muhammad that if he drops it, we'll go to Syria or Khaybar and never come near him again. Abu Lubaba, do you think that we should surrender to Muhammad's judgment?"

"Yes," he said. "Surrender." He instinctively drew his finger across his throat in a gesture of slaughter. He regretted instantly that he had let his pity for the Qurayza interfere with his loyalty to Muhammad: they were not supposed to have known Muhammad's plans. He raced back to Medina, his beard soaked with penitent tears.

In fact it made little difference how much the Qurayza knew. Their case was hopeless. That morning, probably 5 May 627, they declared their surrender to Muhammad.<sup>16</sup>

The Wolf allies of the Qurayza hurried to Muhammad to plead for

their friends. "Give them to us," they said, "as you gave the Qaynuqa to Abdallah Aowf."

"Will you be satisfied," he asked, "if I appoint Saad Nabit to pass judgment?" The Qurayza also agreed to accept Saad's verdict. They had no real choice: it was Saad or Muhammad.

Saad was still lying in a tent in the mosque nursing his wounded arm. The Wolves heaved him onto a donkey with a velvet-padded saddle (he was a very fat man). On their way to Muhammad they kept urging him, "Saad, treat your friends kindly! Allah's Messenger appointed you umpire because he knew you would be merciful. The Qurayza defended you in all the wars. Don't be less gracious than Abdallah Aowf was!"

Saad said he would judge "to please Allah, not men," and the Wolves swore to accept his ruling.

Muhammad told him to pass the verdict.

"I decree," said Saad, "that every adult male shall be killed; every woman and child shall be enslaved; and all their property shall be divided among the Muslims."

Muhammad approved. "You have judged like Allah above the Seven Heavens and like His Messenger."

The Jews spent that night studying the Torah. Muhammad commanded his men to dig trenches in the Qaynuqa Bazaar.<sup>17</sup>

The next day Muhammad sat in the Bazaar with Aisha and his closest friends. He called for the men of the Qurayza tribe to be brought out in small groups, their hands tied to their necks. When they were presented before him, his henchmen pulled down the drawers of the beardless young men, and any who had not grown pubic hair were sent back to the women. The rest were considered adults. The men sat down at the trenches, where Ali and Zubayr cut off their heads.

When Kaab Qurayza stood before Muhammad, he said, "I am still

a Jew.”

Nabbash was brought with a bleeding nose. His guard said that he had struggled and tried to escape. Nabbash said that was a lie: “I can’t wait to be killed with the rest of my people.”

Muhammad told Huayy Nadir: “You took Allah as your surety for your compact. He has kept His side of the bargain and handed you over to us.”

“I do not repent of opposing you,” said Huayy. “Whoever forsakes God will be forsaken. God has let this happen, and His command is right. Calamity has been written for the tribe of Israel.” Huayy and his son were decapitated with the rest.

Nubata, the woman who had dropped the millstone, was also sentenced to death. She sat chatting with Aïsha, laughing her head off until the moment her name was called. Aïsha was left astonished that her companion had been one of the condemned.

Saad Saïda, a Lion chief, tattled to Muhammad that the Wolf tribe opposed the killing of their allies the Qurayza.

Saad Nabit countered, “The *good* Wolves do not oppose it. May Allah disappoint the others!”

Usayd Nabit chimed in: “Allah’s Messenger, apportion some Jews to each clan of the Wolves. That will force the protesters to demonstrate their loyalty to you. Send them to my house first!”

Muhammad duly sent two Jews to each Wolf clan, and each chief cut off a head.

At twilight Ali and Zubayr lit torches. They continued to cut off heads long after dark. Finally the tribe was exterminated. The trenches were filled in with earth and the corpses were covered.

Of the 750 adult men of Qurayza, only six survived. Three saved their skins by converting to Islam. Another crept past the night-guard out into the desert, and nobody ever saw him again. Two had influential Muslim friends who managed to plead their lives

from Muhammad, together with their women, children, property and permission to remain Jewish. This was Muhammad's pattern. He did not kill people who could be useful to him. A favour to a friend was worth more than an isolated ex-enemy who had been frightened into neutrality. A live body to fight in his army was worth more than a dead body to gratify revenge.<sup>18</sup>

The Qurayza land was distributed among the Muslims. They collected up from the Qurayza territory camels, cattle, sheep, 300 mail-shirts, 1,500 shields, 1,500 swords, 1,000 spears, furniture, household utensils, clothes and dates. They also found vats of wine, which they broke and poured out onto the streets. 20% of the animals, weapons and goods were given to Muhammad, and the rest were set for auction.

The Qurayza women and children, after screaming, bodice-ripping, face-slapping and hair-tearing over the death of their men, were also parcelled to Muhammad or auctioned to the Muslims. In either case, most of them were sold on the slave-markets in exchange for horses and weapons.<sup>19</sup>

Muhammad chose the most beautiful Qurayza girl for himself. Her name was Rayhana. Muhammad suggested that she convert to Islam. She replied that she hated Islam and wanted to be Jewish. He then asked her to marry him. She replied that she would rather be a slave for the rest of her life than married to him.

"Fine," he said, "but if you are my slave, you won't have any choice about having sex with me. That's going to happen anyway."

Rayhana therefore lived in Muhammad's household as his slave-concubine.<sup>20</sup>

After Saad Nabit had condemned the Qurayza tribe to death, a goat kicked his arm, and his battle-wound burst open. This time he died of it. Abu Bakr and Umar sobbed over their friend, while the dry-eyed Muhammad clutched at his beard. He said that the angel Gabriel had told him: "The doors of Heaven opened for Saad, and



Allah's throne shook!"

No other Wolf chief was as powerful as Saad, although his cousin Usayd took over as chief of the Nabit clan. Now that Saad was dead and Abdallah Aowf had lost popular support, Saad Saïda emerged, not only as the real chief of the Lions, but also as the high chief of all the Comrades.

Haowza, the head of the Wail family who had plotted with the Confederated Army in the Battle of the Ditch, fled to Khaybar. Since Muhammad never punished the rest of the Wail family, they must have converted to Islam at this point. Their clan, the Aowsmanat, changed its name to Aowsallah.

Muhammad was now supreme in Medina. Every remaining resident had sworn allegiance to him as the political leader. Although a few individuals had not converted to Islam, there were no large non-Muslim groups. Furthermore, he knew that neither the Quraysh nor any other tribe would dare to attack Medina again.<sup>21</sup>

Muhammad had become too powerful to care about the gossip that he had stolen his son's wife, so he celebrated his victory by hosting a lavish wedding banquet for Zaynab. Seventy guests feasted on roast lamb and date pudding, and there was food left over.

Talk became careless, for Abu Bakr's cousin Talha boasted that when Muhammad died, he would marry Aïsha. Tales were told of rude men around town who pestered respectable Muslim women and even spied on Muhammad's wives in the outdoor toilets. Three of the guests sat around talking long after everyone else had gone home. Muhammad had to retire, return and retire again before they took the hint to leave.

As soon as the men had gone, Muhammad drew a curtain and spoke from behind it. He told his servant that Allah had sent down a new prophecy.

*When you are invited, enter, and when you have taken the food, then disperse – not seeking to listen to talk.*

*And when you ask of [women] any goods, ask of them from behind a curtain; this is purer for your hearts and their hearts.*

*It does not bebove you that you should give trouble to the Apostle of Allah, nor that you should marry his wives after him ever; surely this is grievous in the sight of Allah.<sup>22</sup>*

It was the middle part that was important. A wife of Muhammad must keep a curtain between herself and any man who was not a family member. He could discuss necessary business with her but he must not chat about trivia or look at her face. Outside her house, she must wear a veil that hid her face up to the eyes. The rules were not quite so strict for other Muslim women. They had to cover their heads, for Allah did not accept the prayers of an unveiled woman, but they were allowed to expose their hands and faces. As for slave-women, they did not veil at all, even if they were Muslims.

Later Muhammad clarified that his wives must not leave their houses without his permission, which he granted for a good reason, such as visiting their families, going to the toilet or attending public prayers. Muslim women did not have friendships with men; and friendships with women were approved by their husbands.

These new rules were supposed to protect women from the rude men in town. For good measure, men who persisted in harassing veiled women could expect only curses: they would be thrown out of town, nastily murdered and condemned to eternal Hellfire. However, the new rules served another purpose too. Other men would never be able to look at Muhammad's wives in the way that he had looked at Zaynab.<sup>23</sup>

## **Summary**

- Muhammad produced several convenient prophecies that

allowed him to marry his own daughter-in-law.

- Muhammad's opponents, led by the Nadir Jews in Khaybar and the Quraysh in Mecca, teamed up to destroy him. Muhammad built a ditch around the Medina, and the siege failed when his enemies could not find a way to attack him.
- Muhammad attacked the last remaining Jewish tribe in Medina, the Qurayza, and killed all the adult males.
- After this victory, Muhammad was effectively high chief of Medina and he could do what he liked there. The last remaining polytheist clan converted to Islam.

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#### References and Notes to Chapter 11: *Confederates of the Ditch*

1 Q33:4-5a (Shakir).

2 Q33:40 (Shakir). *See* Tabari (Landau-Tasseron) 39:180-181 for the context.

3 Q33:50 (Shakir).

4 Q33:37 (Shakir).

5 Q2:228. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 793 #918. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:72, 77. Bukhari 6:60:305, 310, 311; 9:93:516. Muslim 1:338 f 358; 8:3330. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:1-4; (Poonawala) 9:134; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:180-181. Tabari, *Tafsir* on Q33:37. Qurtubi, *Tafsir* on Q33:37. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q33:51. Jalalayn, *Tafsir* on Q33:36-38. Guillaume (1960) 54. Majlisi (Rizvi) 2:1190-1191.

6 Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:74, 77, 81, 123. Bukhari 5:59:462. Muslim 8:3240, 3241; 31:5984. Abu Dawud 32:4060. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:3; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:181. Zamakhshari 5 #899 on Q33:51. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q 33:37.

7 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 52-53, 450-453, 504. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 764 #697, #700. Waqidi (Faizer) 180-181, 216, 218-223, 359. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:80-82, 86-87, 95. Bukhari 4:52:87; 5:59:425, 430; 8:76:423; 8:77:617. Abu Dawud 19:2998. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:158; (Fishbein) 8:8, 10-11.

8 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 171, 240, 265, 450, 452-453. Waqidi (Faizer) 216-218, 222-224, 230, 238. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:81-83, 87, 95. Abu Dawud 19:2998.

9 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 453-454. Waqidi (Faizer) 223-225, 227-228. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:82.

10 Q33:10. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 453-454, 458, 460. Waqidi (Faizer) 218, 221, 224-229, 232-233, 240. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:82, 89.

11 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 454. Waqidi (Faizer) 233-235. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:84, 90.

12 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 454-457. Waqidi (Faizer) 229-232. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:82-84, 96. Bukhari 1:10:572; 5:59:448. Bukhari, *Mufrad* 45:1129. Muslim 19:4370.

13 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 458-459. Waqidi (Faizer) 235-239. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:84-85, 90.

14 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 453, 454, 459, 460, 461. Waqidi (Faizer) 223, 233, 237, 239-241. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:85, 88, 90, 95.

15 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 460-461, 469. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 765 #711. Waqidi (Faizer) 241-246., 253-254, 260 Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:85, 87, 88, 91-95. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:40. Bukhari 5:59:443, 448-449. Muslim 19:4370. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:29.

16 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 461-464. Waqidi (Faizer) 244, 246-250. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:91-93, 96. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:40-41. Bukhari 5:59:448. Muslim 19:4368, 4370. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:29.

17 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 463-464. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 765 #709. Waqidi (Faizer) 250-252. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:92-93, 96. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:40-41. Bukhari 4:52:280; 5:58:148; 5:59:447, 448; 8:74:278. Muslim 19:4368, 4370. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:29-30, 34.

18 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 463-466. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 765 #711. Waqidi (Faizer) 222, 247-248, 250-255, 260. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:92-93, 95. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:41. Bukhari 5:59:362. Muslim 19:4364. Guillaume (1960) 21-22. Estimates of the exact number range between 600 and 900.

19 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 466. Waqidi (Faizer) 250, 254, 256-257. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:92-93, 96. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:41. Bukhari 5:59:362. Muslim 19:4364.

20 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 466. Waqidi (Faizer) 255-256. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:93; (Bewley) 8:92-94. Guillaume (1960) 55. Some traditions assert that Muhammad freed and married Rayhana. This may be so, for there is also evidence that he later divorced and later still re-enslaved her. She certainly died as his slave.

21 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 201, 230, 265, 450, 468-469, 676, 683-686. Waqidi (Faizer) 217, 258. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:96; (Bewley) 3:479-480. Bukhari 5:59:362, 448. Muslim 19:4364; 37:6673. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:39-40. Watt (1956) 168, 177-179.

22 Q33:53 (Shakir).

23 Q24:31; 33:32-33, 37, 55, 59-66. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:74, 76-77, 127-130, 138, 142, 170, 317. Bukhari 1:4:148; 6:60:314, 315, 316, 317, 318; 7:62:84, 92, 95, 97, 100, 123; 7:65:375; 8:74:255, 256, 288; 9:93:517. Muslim 8:3110, 3328, 3331, 3333, 3334, 3336; 26:5395. Abu Dawud 2:641; 33:4092. Tabari (Landau-Tasseron) 39:9, 180-181. Qurtubi, *Tafsir* on Q33:33, 37, 59. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q33:53.

## *Warlord of the West*

**May 627 – May 628**

Muhammad was King of Medina. He could have exploited his status as a prophet to govern peacefully and cultivate friendly relationships with neighbouring tribes, producing revelations as the task required and composing profound prophecies on the meaning of life.

However, that was not his plan. It was at this time that he began to send messengers to other Arab chiefs and to neighbouring heads of state to invite them to convert to Islam.

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful: I am Allah's Messenger to all mankind. I warn whoever is living: convert to Islam, and you will be safe. Convert to Islam, and Allah will reward you doubly. Believe in Allah alone, and your Kingdom shall remain yours. If you refuse Allah's summons, you will suffer the punishment of a sinner.

He continued to send similar messages for several years.<sup>1</sup>

He still assumed that real Islam required Allah to control the Kaaba and Allah's Prophet to control Mecca. Dominion over Mecca remained his goal. He was not yet powerful enough to attack Mecca directly but he found a way to make the Quraysh suffer.

The old Kilab chief, Abu Baraa, had died, so Muhammad no longer had a treaty with the Kilab tribe. The new chief was Abu Baraa's nephew, the one-eyed Amir, who had coordinated the ambush at Mawuna Wells two years earlier. Muhammad finally had a chance to punish Amir for this crime. In June he sent his henchman Ibn Maslama with thirty cavalrymen to attack a small Kilab clan called the Qurata. This was not Amir's own clan; in fact, the Qurata had expressly refused to help him attack the Muslims at Mawuna Wells.

At worst, their crime had been to fail to warn the victims of the impending ambush—assuming they had even known about it in time. So it was a weak excuse for a war; but if Muhammad gave any other pretext, nobody remembered it afterwards.

Nevertheless, Ibn Maslama trekked to the heart of central Arabia, located the Qurata, attacked them twice, killed a dozen men and stole 150 camels and 3,000 goats. He brought one human captive back to Medina and tied him to a pillar of the mosque.

The raiders had no idea who their prisoner was; but Muhammad recognised him. His name was Thumama, and he was not from the Kilab at all, but was the chief of the Hanifa tribe, one of the most powerful rulers in central Arabia. This capture was perhaps the luckiest accident of Muhammad's life.

Thumama was a demanding prisoner. He ate all the food that Muhammad's wives could collect for him and drank one camel's whole milk-yield, yet he was still hungry.

Muhammad was also a demanding jailer. He made sure that everyone else treated Thumama with respect but he left him tied to the pillar for three days and kept urging him to convert to Islam.

"Enough!" interrupted the prisoner at last. "If you show me mercy, I'll be grateful. If you kill me, I'll cost you a lot of blood-money. If you set me for ransom, as much money as you demand will be paid to you." He repeated this reasoning every day.

By the fourth day, Muhammad and Thumama had agreed on their terms. Muhammad released him for no cash at all. Thumama walked out of Medina, took a bath, then turned around and presented himself in the mosque. He took the declaration of faith and pledged loyalty to Muhammad.

Thumama had been on his way to Mecca to perform the Minor Pilgrimage when he was kidnapped. He decided to visit Mecca after all and make the pilgrimage as a Muslim. He entered the city shouting, "Here I am at Thy service, O Allah! Here I am! I follow

the best religion, the religion of Muhammad.”

The Quraysh gasped at his bold loyalty to their enemy. Some of them grabbed him and even threatened to cut off his head; but they remembered in time that nearly all the food in Mecca was bought from the corn-farming Hanifa tribe.

Thumama swore as they released him: “Not a grain of corn from central Arabia will reach you until Allah’s Messenger permits it.”

He was as bad as his word. From that day, he not only forbade his tribe to sell to Mecca but he also blockaded all the trade routes. No food reached Mecca for at least the next ten months. People lived on animals that had starved to death and gruel, then on blood and bones, then on camel-hair and hides. The Quraysh were not even safe to leave Mecca to sell their own produce, and so their economy stagnated. Muhammad turned a blind eye to his new friend’s work and ignored the situation.<sup>2</sup>

With Mecca under control, Muhammad concentrated on enemies nearer to Medina. This was to be his most militant year so far. He sent out seventeen expeditions, only three of which were in defence.

In summer Pop-Eye, high chief of the Ghatafan, stole Muhammad’s twenty camels. It probably did not seem like stealing to Pop-Eye, since Muhammad had already stolen hundreds of camels from him. The Muslim herder tried to fend them off and was killed in the skirmish. Muhammad sent his cavalry after the Ghatafan. The Muslims caught up with them, fought them, killed Pop-Eye’s son and brought back the camels.

In autumn the angel-faced Dihya returned from Syria complaining that he had been robbed on the way home. The robbers’ own tribe had tracked them down and forced them to restore Dihya’s merchandise; but they had not punished them. So Muhammad sent out a vengeance-mission that killed the two robbers (and three other men) and captured 100 prisoners, 1,000 camels and 5,000

goats. The tribe managed to prove that they had converted to Islam before the raid, so Muhammad ordered all the stolen property to be returned, including women in the act of being raped.

In winter the camels were stolen again. This time the theft was not the strategy of a hostile tribe but the crime of eight commonplace bandits. They faked a conversion to Islam, lived as Muhammad's guests among the camels for a while, then led the animals away for themselves. When the herdsman stood up to them, they cut off his hands and feet, stuck thorns in his eyes and tongue and left him to die.

He was dead by the time he was discovered. Muhammad sent his cavalry to pursue the murderers. They overtook them as they were feasting on one of the camels. They captured the bandits, tied them onto the camels and brought the herd back to Medina, bearing tales that the culprits had also been worshipping their old idols.

Muhammad ruled exact retribution. The murderers' hands and feet were cut off; their eyes were gouged out with hot irons; they were left lying on a stony plain to die of thirst or blood-loss; then their corpses were crucified. Muhammad produced a prophecy for the occasion.

*For this reason did We prescribe to the children of Israel that whoever slays a soul, unless it be for manslaughter or for mischief in the land, it is as though he slew all men; and whoever keeps it alive, it is as though he kept alive all men ... The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His messenger and strive to make mischief in the land is only this, that they should be murdered or crucified or their hands and their feet should be cut off on opposite sides or they should be imprisoned; this shall be as a disgrace for them in this world, and in the hereafter they shall have a grievous chastisement.<sup>3</sup>*

Despite Allah's endorsement, Muhammad reconsidered, for after this, he never allowed an eye to be gouged. He also forbade his raiders to mutilate war-captives.<sup>4</sup>



Most Arabs understood that there were moral and immoral ways to fight wars. The Muslims were sometimes surprised by what Allah allowed. One warrior asked Muhammad: "What happens when we attack the enemy by dark and we accidentally strike women or children?" He replied that there was nothing wrong with this, for, "They belong to the tribe too. There is no protection except with Allah and His Messenger." Although Muhammad – like most Arabs – did not set out to kill non-combatants, he recognised that it might sometimes be the only way to win the war.

None of his other raids that year was defensive. He usually gave the excuse, truthful or otherwise, that it was in revenge for a past wrong or to pre-empt a future plot. He only led two of the raids himself; the rest he delegated. His favourite commander was his ex-son Zayd, who was a famous archer.

Muhammad inspired his troops by enlarging on the glory of dying for Allah. Despite his habit of sending other men to fight for him, or of hiding in the safest patch of the battle-field even when he was present, he boasted: "I wish I never had to miss out on any *jihad*. I would love to become a *shabeed* in Allah's cause, and then come to life and be made a *shabeed* again, and then come to life and be made a *shabeed* again, and then be resurrected and then made a *shabeed* yet again."<sup>5</sup>

He ordered five attacks against the Ghatafan, who had fought at the Battle of the Ditch and were still allies of the Jews. Twice the Ghatafan completely defeated the Muslim raiders. Twice they fled and the Muslims were only able to steal a few camels. Finally Zayd ambushed a small but powerful clan and captured their chieftainess, the elderly Umm Qirfa. He had each of her legs tied to the leg of a camel and the camels driven to run in opposite directions until she was torn in two. Muhammad was delighted by Zayd's account of his victory.

Muhammad led a grand raid to punish the Hudhayl tribe for killing the ten Muslims two years earlier. The adventure was a flop

because he never located his enemy.

He sent Zayd to punish the Sulaym tribe for the massacre at Mawuna Wells, but Zayd only managed to capture a few prisoners and steal some animals.

Another expedition was supposed to punish the Asad, presumably for fighting in the Battle of the Ditch. The raiders captured 200 camels but no humans, either dead or alive.

Zayd had better luck when he robbed a Quraysh caravan. He brought all the merchandise back to Medina, with the merchants as his prisoners. Muhammad's daughter Zaynab discovered that her husband Lakit was one of the prisoners and she took him under her protection. So Zayd's good work was wasted, for Muhammad could not rob a protected person. The Muslims returned the plunder to Lakit, down to the last wash-bowl and rope. He took it back to Mecca and distributed it among the merchants who had invested in his caravan.<sup>6</sup>

The fact that half of these "punishment" raids failed shows that Muhammad did not really know where these nomadic tribes were or what they were doing. His spies would certainly not have been able to locate all the tribes in time to discover every single plot against Medina before it happened. Since no plot against Medina ever succeeded, it is practically certain that his tales of tribes "plotting against Medina" were fictitious excuses to justify his raids. The real purpose of the raids was to terrify his neighbours so that they would never dare oppose him. He had valid fears of only two enemies: the Quraysh in Mecca and the Jews in Khaybar.

He was on constant alert in case the Nadir in Khaybar tried to invade Medina to reclaim their lost territory. He "suspected" a Hawazin clan of collecting warriors to fight for Khaybar so he sent Ali with a squad to fight them. The clan fled, crying, "Misfortune! Muhammad is attacking us and we are not strong enough to resist!" Ali stole 500 camels and 2,000 goats.

Abu Rafi, the high chief of Khaybar, had been active in mobilising the Battle of the Ditch. This gave five Muslims from the Wolf tribe the excuse to petition Muhammad: "You let the Lions kill Kaab Nadir. We want to be the ones to kill Abu Rafi." Muhammad gave permission. The assassins brazenly knocked on Abu Rafi's door, saying they had a gift for him, then charged in with drawn swords and stabbed him on his own bed.

Soon there were rumours that the new High chief of Khaybar, Yusayr, was gathering an army of Ghatafan, or that he was already marching to Medina with an army of Jews. Although the spies could not agree on their story, Muhammad sent thirty Muslims to Khaybar with the instruction: "Don't let Yusayr be seen again." The Muslims lured thirty Jews out of the city for "peace talks", pilfered their swords, then on a signal attacked and killed them. Yusayr fought back with a tree-branch; but only one Jew survived.<sup>7</sup>

Yet Muhammad's most successful expedition was neither for revenge nor defence. He decided to launch another attack on Dumat al-Jandal on the Syrian border. Its inhabitants, the Kalb, had never retaliated for his attempt to invade them the previous year, which only confirmed his impression they were a soft target. He sent the enterprising merchant Abdalrahman with 700 armed men "to invite them to Islam". If the Kalb did not accept the invitation, Muhammad instructed, "Attack in Allah's name and in Allah's Pathway, and kill those who do not believe in Allah."

The Kalb tribe took no notice of Abdalrahman's preaching, so the army had to start fighting. After they had besieged Dumat al-Jandal for three days, the chief agreed to become a Muslim. Several others followed his example. The rest were allowed to remain Christian, provided they paid a tribute-tax to Medina for the privilege. Abdalrahman sealed the bargain by marrying the chief's daughter and bringing her back to Medina, a hostage for her father's obedience.

This was Muhammad's first *jihad* of pure conquest. It did not

directly contribute to his goal of conquering Mecca; it was a sideline to terrify his neighbours, for, as he boasted, "Terror has made me victorious." By this time it was in his mind that he might one day rule all Arabia.<sup>8</sup>

While Abdalrahman was still in Dumat al-Jandal, Muhammad decided to launch another raiding-party. This time his target was the small but wealthy Mustaliq clan, who had fought at the Battle of the Ditch and were still allies of Abu Sufyan. They controlled the temple of the goddess Manat at Qudayd, where they also offered hospitality to the Quraysh trading caravans, so bringing them under Muslim control would be a strike at Mecca's trade.

Muhammad made an excuse that they were plotting with "other tribes" to attack Medina, but the other tribes were never identified and no evidence of the plot was ever uncovered. Muhammad only took 700 warriors with him; he would not have left his remaining 1,600 idle in Medina if he had really expected to confront a multi-tribe army. More likely he devised the pretext so that he could keep his restless warriors busy.

The Muslims captured a Mustaliq scout and cut off his head. They located half the clan grazing their animals at Muraysi Wells and surrounded them before the Mustaliq noticed their arrival.

Umar proclaimed: "If you want to keep your lives and your possessions, testify, 'There is no god but Allah!'"

The startled Mustaliq yelled back, "No!" and fired an arrow.

A volley of arrows from both directions followed, until Muhammad ordered the assault, and the Muslims charged down to the wells, screaming, "Kill, kill, victors!"

The women, children and animals fled, while the men desperately fought back, but the Muslims had them surrounded. It was a matter of minutes before the battle was over and all the survivors were captured. Humans, camels, goats, weapons, bags and money were distributed among the Muslims.<sup>9</sup>

Among the prisoners was the daughter of the Mustaliq chief, whose husband had been killed in the battle. She was twenty years old and so magnetically beautiful that men fell in love with her at first sight. Muhammad was no exception. He bought her from her first captor for six times the going rate and added her to his collection of wives. He named her *Juwayriya*, which means “slavey”.

Aïsha took an instant dislike to her ravishing new rival; but she need not have worried. Juwayriya made excuses to avoid Muhammad’s company. Since she was very conscious of her powers over men, her failure to charm Muhammad was probably deliberate. He quickly lost interest in her.<sup>10</sup>

Two pressing issues arose on the march back to Medina. After nearly a month without their wives, the men were desperate to rape their captives. They knew, however, that any who became pregnant would be redeemed at a much lower ransom price. Was the solution to practise withdrawal? Muhammad said there was no point in trying to reduce the odds of pregnancy. “If Allah has destined a person’s existence, that person will be conceived regardless.” So the men raped their captives without worrying about the consequences.<sup>11</sup>

A brawl erupted when an Immigrant kicked a Comrade. Muhammad calmed them down. When Abdallah Aowf heard of it, he said: “Did they really do that? Those Immigrants are trying to take over our city. When we return to Medina, the stronger will drive out the weaker. Look at what you have done to yourselves – you let them into your city, and they entered your homes; you shared your property with them, and now they are rich. Now they will not be satisfied until you let them kill you!”

Umar volunteered to cut off Abdallah’s head; other people said Ibn Maslama should do the deed. Muhammad replied that he did not want people to accuse him of killing his followers. The next day Abdallah’s own son volunteered to behead him, and Muhammad had to talk him out of it. He drove the men to a quick march for

the rest of the day, then all through the night and through half the morning. They were so exhausted when he finally let them camp that they were distracted from Abdallah's complaints.

A day or two later, Abdallah heard a foolish rumour that Aïsha, now a beauty of almost fourteen, had committed adultery. He had no way of knowing whether she was really guilty, but he knew the scandal would cause trouble for Muhammad. He encouraged the wagging tongues until the story was all over Medina.

He was right. Aïsha wept for two sleepless days and nights. Ali advised Muhammad to divorce her, for there were plenty more women in the world. Usayd Nabit, a Wolf, volunteered to assassinate Abdallah Aowf; Saad Saïda, a Lion, threatened to fight anyone who tried; Usayd called Saad a hypocrite; and there was nearly a Lions-against-Wolves riot in the mosque. The matter was only settled when Gabriel gave Muhammad a decisive prophecy: Allah had told him that Aïsha was innocent.

Three of the slander-mongers were flogged eighty lashes each. Although Muhammad did not dare flog Abdallah, the chief was finished as a political leader in Medina.<sup>12</sup>

This was a period of drought. Every day Muhammad prayed in the mosque for rain, and in the end it rained in Medina. Conditions were worse in Mecca, where the dry heat aggravated the artificial blockade of food supplies. Grasslands grew yellower and disappeared into the dust; trees shed their leaves and expired; sheep and cattle starved and perished; and small children died of malnutrition-related diseases. With no imports arriving, even prices on inedible goods soared.<sup>13</sup>

At this time of desolation, a Bedouin arrived in Medina asking for Muhammad. Muhammad exclaimed, "That man is a traitor!" even before the stranger rushed toward him. Usayd Nabit seized the man's breeches, and a dagger clattered to the floor. The Bedouin squealed for mercy while Usayd gripped at his neck and forced him away from Muhammad.

“Tell the truth,” said Muhammad. “Who are you?”

After Muhammad had guaranteed his life, the Bedouin confessed that Abu Sufyan had called for an assassin to take Muhammad by surprise at the bazaar. He had volunteered, and Abu Sufyan had paid all his expenses. The stranger was of no importance. Muhammad set him free; he mouthed the declaration of Islam; and he disappeared into the desert, never to be seen again.<sup>14</sup>

What mattered was that Abu Sufyan had attempted to hit back. Muhammad decided to survey the situation in Mecca at first hand.

He announced that Allah had promised him they would enter Mecca and perform the Minor Pilgrimage at the Kaaba. 1,400 Muslims volunteered for the excursion. He stressed that they were not going to fight and would not need weapons. If Muhammad had been serious about fighting the Quraysh, he would not have left half his army in Medina. His real intention was to intimidate them while he assessed how soon in the future he could take over the city.

They set out on 16 March 628, dressed in the white robes of pilgrims and herding seventy camels and cows garlanded for the sacrifice. Among the marked victims was Mahri, the camel that Muhammad had “inherited” from Mr Stupid at Badr. A few miles out of Medina he decided that they might need to defend themselves if the Quraysh attacked, so he sent a message to have their horses and arms forwarded to them. On the journey they called out to all the Bedouin tribes that they passed, “Come and join us!” Only about a hundred men accepted the invitation; the rest said they did not want to fight the Quraysh.

The starving Quraysh were alarmed to hear that a huge company of Muslims was approaching. They took it for granted that the pilgrim costumes were just a disguise for a military attack and they agreed that the “pilgrims” could never be admitted to Mecca. They called up their allies from the Harith, Hun and Thaqif tribes to resist Muhammad and sent Khalid out with a cavalry of 200.

At first the Muslims agreed to fight anyone who blocked their way to the Kaaba. However, they had to reconsider when they saw the size of the Meccan army, which outnumbered them three to one. Muhammad decided to circle around the army and sneak into Mecca the back way. They took a rugged, rocky track between passes, losing their way several times, narrowly avoiding Khalid's cavalry, and finally halted in Hudaybiya Valley, just on the edge of the sacred area, about nine miles from Mecca.<sup>15</sup>

Neither side really wanted to fight, so for several days they sent each other messengers.

Each time Muhammad said the same thing. "We haven't come to fight; we've come to walk around the Kaaba. Of course we'll fight anyone who blocks us."

Each time the Quraysh delegate insisted, "You don't have our permission to enter Mecca," and warned him that he had no chance of winning a battle against their army.

With a happy disregard for the vulnerability of the Muslim company, Abu Bakr told two of the delegates to go and have oral sex with the goddess Al-Lat, and Muhammad's bodyguard threatened to cut off the hand of one of them. When a Muslim messenger ventured into Mecca, Mr Stupid's son Ikrima slashed the hamstrings of his camel and threatened to kill the man.

Muhammad sent his son-in-law Uthman into the city. Abu Sufyan\* and the other elders lined up to hear him, and Uthman preached as if he had already won the war.

"Allah's Messenger calls you to Allah and Islam, so enter the religion! Otherwise we'll let you remain neutral while he fights other tribes. If he wins, you will then have the choice of either converting to Islam or fighting Muhammad. But war has exhausted you, and you are too weak to fight now. Finally, Allah's Messenger

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\* Abu Sufyan did not play any significant part in the negotiation of Hudaybiya. Perhaps his recent attempt to kill Muhammad had ruled him out as a diplomat.



hasn't come to fight anyone right now. He just wants to make the pilgrimage and then go home again."

"Never!" they replied. "Muhammad will not enter the Sacred Area without our permission."

For the next three days, the Quraysh kept Uthman as a hostage. While he was in Mecca he met an unhappy community of Muslims who felt oppressed by the Quraysh.

While negotiations continued, Mahri, the prize camel with the silver nose-ring, also wandered out of Hudaybiya. He walked into Mecca, made his way through the familiar streets and knocked on the front door of his old home. Mr Stupid's family recognised him and welcomed him back with great joy.<sup>16</sup>

Then the Muslims heard that Uthman had been murdered. Muhammad called his company to make a pledge of *jihad*, "for we shall not leave until we have fought them." Muhammad stood under an acacia tree, Umar holding his hand, while the men shoved past each other and trampled the scrub to reach him. They swore: "I pledge allegiance to thee and thy wishes and I swear not to flee the battle." Some of them varied it to "I swear to fight until I die."

"You are the best people on earth!" said Muhammad.

While they scrambled to put on their weapons, another messenger arrived from Mecca. Uthman was not dead. The rumour had been false. So Muhammad dropped his plan of attack and sent more negotiators to the Quraysh, who also sent more negotiators to him. They all claimed that they wanted a peaceful resolution to the problem.

One of Muhammad's messages was that Mr Stupid's family must return the camel. Mahri was his camel now, lawfully plundered from a battle; and he had marked him for sacrifice, so even when the Quraysh offered him a hundred she-camels in exchange, he could not blaspheme by accepting their offer. To the family's distress, the Quraysh elders herded Mahri back to Muhammad.

That night a contingent of fifty Quraysh crept into Hudaibiya to spy on the Muslims. One of them shot a Muslim dead,\* and the hue and cry was raised. The Muslim ruffian Ibn Maslama captured twelve of the Quraysh and brought them to Muhammad. When the Quraysh heard about the capture, another group came and attacked the Muslims' camp with arrows and stones.<sup>17</sup>

It was time for a swift resolution before a serious battle broke out. The Quraysh sent an elder named Suhayl† to negotiate with Muhammad. Despite Suhayl's history of opposition to Islam, Muhammad trusted his honest intentions.

Suhayl began by saying that the elders' official position was not to fight with Muhammad, and that the fools who had attacked his camp had acted without their knowledge or permission. Muhammad agreed that all remaining captives on both sides should be returned. Negotiations paused until all the hostages – including Uthman and a son of Abu Sufyan – were safely exchanged.

Muhammad sat cross-legged, surrounded by Ali, his bodyguard and other Muslims, while the cleft-lipped Suhayl knelt opposite them, flanked by two supporters. None of them ever disclosed many details of their discussion, which sometimes became heated. However, both sides knew that the Quraysh held the advantage. The Muslims had camped in a small valley that could be ambushed, and the Quraysh had an army of 4,000, so if Muhammad did not agree to the conditions, they could destroy him. If he did not want that, he had to stop bluffing about granting “concessions” to the Quraysh and to accept that it was the Quraysh who were granting concessions to Muhammad. After a long discussion, he was forced

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\* We are not told what the Muslim was doing when the Quraysh man killed him. He might have been acting suspiciously or even violently; or he might have been innocent.

† Suhayl was related to Muhammad's wife Saowda; he was her father's first cousin and her first husband's brother.

to agree to Suhayl's conditions.

Muhammad told Ali to put their compact in writing. "Begin: 'In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful –'"

"We don't recognise 'beneficent' or 'merciful,'" interrupted Suhayl. "Just write, 'In the name of Allah,' or I won't make any compact with you."

Muhammad hushed his disciples and told Ali: "Write: 'This is what Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, has agreed –'"

"Stop," ordered Suhayl. "I don't recognise that you are Allah's Messenger. Don't you like your father's name?"

Usayd Nabit and Saad Saïda threatened to fight Ali if he listened to Suhayl; but Muhammad instructed him to oblige. Finally Ali wrote something.

### **The Compact of Hudaybiya**

In the name of Allah, this is the peace that Muhammad ibn Abdallah has agreed with Suhayl ibn Amru.

1. The Muslims and the Quraysh will not fight for the next ten years.
2. There will be no hostility or secret reservation or cheating. This is a firm commitment with no loopholes.
3. The Muslims will go away this year and not enter Mecca without our permission.
4. Next year Muhammad can visit Mecca for three nights only, carrying no weapons (except a sheathed sword like any other traveller).
5. People from Mecca who try to join Muhammad in Medina (without their guardians' permission) will be returned to Mecca.
6. People from Medina who leave Islam to join the Quraysh

will be allowed to stay in Mecca.

7. Other tribes are allowed to ally with either Muhammad or the Quraysh and become part of this compact.

Both Quraysh and Muslims are equally bound by this compact.<sup>18</sup>

The Khuza'a tribe jumped up and said, "We and our allies make a compact with Muhammad!"

The Bakr tribe jumped up and said, "We and our allies make a compact with the Quraysh!"

Then there was a clank of irons, and there stood Suhayl's son Abu Jandal, wearing a prisoner's chains. His father had been keeping him locked up because he was a Muslim; but with all the excitement of near-war, Abu Jandal had managed to escape. He wanted Muhammad to take him to Medina.

Suhayl whipped him across the face with a thorny branch and grabbed his collar to drag him back to the Quraysh. Abu Jandal shrieked, "Will you let them take me back to the polytheists and tempt me away from my faith?" The Muslims began to weep for him.

"We haven't signed the document yet," said Muhammad. "Let your son come with me."

"I won't sign anything if you don't give him back," retorted Suhayl. "We had agreed to the contract before he appeared, so Abu Jandal is the first person whom I claim under it."

So Muhammad had to hand Abu Jandal back to the Quraysh, "for we cannot be treacherous."

Umar walked alongside Abu Jandal, ignoring Suhayl's attempts to push him away. "Be patient, Abu Jandal," he urged. "The life of a polytheist is worth no more than the life of a dog. A man may kill his father for Allah!" He offered the hilt of his sword, hoping that Abu Jandal would take it and kill Suhayl; but Abu Jandal scrupled

to kill his own father. Two friendly Quraysh offered Abu Jandal a home in their fortress, which would remove him from his father's persecution; and so he returned to Mecca.

After nine Muslim and two polytheistic witnesses had signed the document, Muhammad and Suhayl quarrelled over who should keep it. A copy was written for Suhayl, and Muhammad took the original.<sup>19</sup>

After the Quraysh returned to the city, Muhammad had to face his distraught disciples. They were dismayed, humiliated and miserable by the compact that Muhammad had just imposed on them.

"Aren't you Allah's Messenger?" demanded Umar. "Aren't we Muslims? Aren't they polytheists on a false path? Why should we agree to something that demeans our religion?"

Muhammad must have been thinking the same thing, but he kept calm. "I am Allah's slave and Messenger. I will never disobey Him, and He will not make me a loser."

Nor could the Muslims understand why the pilgrimage was not working out the way Muhammad had promised. Led by Umar, they complained, "Allah's Messenger, didn't you promise us that we would make the pilgrimage? Yet neither we nor our sacrifices have reached the Kaaba."

"You will reach it," Muhammad promised, "but I didn't say it would happen this year, did I?"

Umar answered back, point by point, and even toyed with the idea of disobeying his Prophet. Abu Bakr advised him, "Stick to what he says, for he is Allah's Messenger and always right. We shall never disagree with Allah."

"Now end your pilgrimage right here," Muhammad commanded. "Stand up and sacrifice your animals!"

At first the Muslims were too angry to obey him. Muhammad put on his white robe, with his right shoulder exposed, and speared

Mahri's throat, crying, "In the name of Allah the greatest!" At this example, the Muslims all slaughtered their sacrifices too and ate them at Hudaibiya. Muhammad shared Mahri with Abu Bakr, Umar and four others.<sup>20</sup>

The Quraysh whispered to Abdallah Aowf that *he* would be welcome to circle the Kaaba; but his son was watching him, so Abdallah had to decline the honour.<sup>21</sup>

Half way home to Medina, Muhammad announced a new prophecy. Umar worried that it would be about himself and his rebellious attitude. Other people rushed to hear what Muhammad was reciting.

*Surely We have given to you a clear victory, that Allah may forgive your community their past faults and those to follow ...*<sup>22</sup>

"Allah's Messenger," they asked, "is it really a victory?"

"Certainly!" he replied. However, he knew he would have to produce an event that *felt* like a victory to the Muslims. So he promised them:<sup>23</sup>

*Allah was well pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you under the tree ... Allah promised you many acquisitions which you will take ... Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those with him are firm of heart against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves ... that He may enrage the unbelievers on account of them.*<sup>24</sup>

Back in Medina, Muhammad found a small opportunity to embarrass his enemies. Abu Sufyan had a daughter, Umm Habiba, who was a devout Muslim. Now came the news that her husband had died. If Umm Habiba would agree to marry Muhammad, the whole world would witness that Abu Sufyan's own daughter had rejected him for his enemy.

Umm Habiba was one of the last few Muslims still living in Ethiopia. So Muhammad wrote to the Emperor, asking him to arrange the marriage and to return all the remaining Muslims to

Arabia. The letter was carried by Amru al-Damri, the man whom Muhammad had charged to assassinate Abu Sufyan two years earlier. Umm Habiba, who hinted at a conflicted relationship with her first husband, accepted the Prophet's proposal with great joy.<sup>25</sup>

## Summary

- Muhammad launched a series of raids on surrounding tribes. A few of these were defensive, but most were in revenge or unprovoked.
- He blockaded Mecca and caused a famine there.
- He conquered the Syrian city of Dumat al-Jandal and forced its citizens to pay tribute to him.
- He tried to visit Mecca, but the Quraysh army blocked his way at Hudaibiya. He was forced to sign a humiliating compact that bound him to a ten-year cease-fire on unequal terms.

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## References and Notes to Chapter 12: *Warlord of the West*

1 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 652-653, 655-657. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 788-789 #900. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:151, 304-305. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:132. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:98-100, 104.

2 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 654, 662, 676-677. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 791-792 #915. Waqidi (Faizer) 270. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:96-97. Bukhari 1:8:451, 458; 3:41:604, 605; 5:59:658; 6:60:297. Muslim 19:4361. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 3:203. Kister (1981).

3 Q5:32-33 (Shakir). They are verses 35-36 in Shakir's translation.

4 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 486-488, 662-664, 672, 677-678. Waqidi (Faizer) 91, 264-269, 273-275, 279-281. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:99-104, 108-109, 114-115. Bukhari 1:4:234; 2:24:577; 4:52:278; 5:59:505; 7:71:623; 8:82:79, 797; 9:83:37. Muslim 16:4130, 4132, 4135. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:43-51, 94, 97-98.

5 Waqidi (Faizer) 283. Bukhari 4:52:256; 9:90:332. Muslim 19:4321. *See also* Malik 21:3:10 for a list of much stricter rules, probably the ones followed by non-Muslim Arabs.

6 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 316-317, 485-486, 660-662, 664-665. Waqidi (Faizer) 263-264, 270-273, 277-278. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:97-99, 104-109, 111-112, 147. Muslim 19:4345. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:42-43, 92-97; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:10. Ibn Asakir #72194. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q33:37. Ibn Hajar, *Isaba* 7 #10176.

7 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 482-484, 661, 665-666. Waqidi (Faizer) 4, 192-193, 276-279. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:110-114. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:95; (Poonawala) 9:120.

8 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 672. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 790 #912. Waqidi (Faizer) 275-276. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:110. Bukhari 4:52:220. *See also* Muslim 4:1062, 1063, 1066, 1067. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:95.

9 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 171, 452, 490-493. Ibn al-Kalbi (Faris) 12-13. Waqidi (Faizer) 198-202, 217. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:77-80. Bukhari 3:46:717. Muslim 2:2349, 3371; 19:4292. Abu Dawud 14:2627. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:51-57. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 3:212; 4:420. Ibn Hajar, *Bulugh* 11:1307. Fishbein (1997) xv. Kennedy (2001).

10 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 490, 493. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 793 #918. Waqidi (Faizer) 201. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:44, 46, 81, 83-85, 90, 123. Bukhari 3:31:207; 3:46:717, 718; 5:59:462. Muslim 2:2349, 3371; 19:4292; 25:5334; 31:5984; 35:6575, 6576. Abu Dawud 1:1498; 8:1498; 14:2627; 29:3920; 30:3920. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:57; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:182-184. Zamakhshari 5:899 on Q33:51. Guillaume (1960) 54.

11 Malik 29:95. Waqidi (Faizer) 201, 202. Bukhari 3:46:718; 5:59:459; 9:93:506. Muslim 8:3371. Abu Dawud 11:2167.

12 Q24:4, 12-20. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 491-492, 494-498. Waqidi (Faizer) 203-206, 208-216. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:79-80. Bukhari 3:48:829; 5:59:462; 6:60:274; 7:62:119; 7:72:145. Muslim 37:6673. Abu Dawud 38:4459. Tirmidhi 5:44:3315; 6:44:3181. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:7; (Fishbein) 8:51-55, 57-67. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q24:14.

13 Tabari (Fishbein) 8:95. Kister (1981).

14 Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:116. The man's name is unknown.

15 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 499-500, 502, 505. Malik 23:9. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 769 #754. Waqidi (Faizer) 217, 281-282, 284-287, 302. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:117-118, 122, 124, 127-128, 131. Bukhari 3:50:891; 4:56:777; 5:59:471, 474, 475, 477; 6:60:364. Muslim 20:4576, 4578, 4580, 4581, 4583. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:67-71, 89.

16 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 501-503. Waqidi (Faizer) 285-286, 291-296, 302. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:119-120. Bukhari 3:50:891.

17 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 503-505. Waqidi (Faizer) 296-297, 302. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:120, 124-125. Bukhari 4:52:205; 5:59:475, 487; 9:89:313. Muslim 20:4576, 4578, 4579, 4580, 4590. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:79-81, 83-84.

18 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 504. Waqidi (Faizer) 301. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:120-121, 125-127. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:60-61. Bukhari 3:50:891.

19 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 504-505. Waqidi (Faizer) 296-301. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:120-121, 125-126. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:60-61. Bukhari 3:50:891. Muslim 19:4402. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:79-81.

20 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 504-505. Malik 20:99. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 769-770 #758. Waqidi (Faizer) 281, 298-302. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:121, 126, 128. Bukhari 3:50:891. Muslim 19:4409.

21 Waqidi (Faizer) 297.

22 Q48:1-2 (Shakir).

23 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 505-506. Waqidi (Faizer) 304. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:122, 130-131. Muslim 19:4409.

24 Q48:18, 20, 29 (Shakir).

25 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 146, 210, 526-527, 784. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 790-791 #913; 793 #918. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:305; (Bewley) 8:68-70. Bukhari 7:62:38. Muslim 2: 1581, 3539, 2963, 3413. Abu Dawud 11:2081, 2102. Ibn Maja 5:3974. Tabari (McDonald/Watt) 7:147-150; (Fishbein) 8:109t; (Poonawala) 9:133-134; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:177-180. Ibn Asakir #164, #169, #6161. *Umm Habiba* was a teknonym; her personal name was Ramla.



## *Khaybar*

**May 628 – June 629**

Muhammad could not ignore the Compact of Hudaibiya. Although he had broken agreements before, it had only been with people weaker than himself and near to home. If he was too obvious about breaking his promises at Hudaibiya, the surrounding tribes would never trust him again, and he knew he might need alliances with those tribes in the future. So he had to be careful over how he extracted himself from the Compact. It must not *look* like promise-breaking to outsiders.

The Quraysh had made one mistake already. Their Hudaibiya negotiations had never mentioned the blockade of their trade-routes. Of course, Muhammad had agreed that there would be “no hostility or secret reservation or cheating”; but this was a vague condition. There was nothing in the Compact that directly obliged him to stop the famine in Mecca.

Only days later, a Meccan named Abu Basir arrived in Medina. He said he was a Muslim who had only just escaped from being locked up by the Quraysh oppressors. Three days later, two Quraysh men arrived to take him home. Muhammad told Abu Basir that he must return to Mecca with them, “for Allah will provide a way out for people like you.”

Abu Basir found a way out. Out in the desert, he tricked one of his guards into handing over his sword and then murdered him with it. He stole their camel and ran back to Medina to tell Muhammad: “You have kept your side of the bargain; it isn’t your fault that I defended myself.”

Muhammad refused to take him back, remarking, “You would start a war if you had men with you!”

Abu Basir went to the Red Sea Coast, where he lived off fish

washed in from the sea and positioned himself on the trade-route to Syria.<sup>1</sup>

Muhammad's son-in-law Lakit also came to Medina, saying he was now a Muslim. This did not count as a breach of the Compact because Lakit was a senior member of his clan and had no guardian. So Muhammad granted him permission to live again with Zaynab, whom he conceded to be "the most capable of my daughters."<sup>2</sup>

The next Meccan to turn up in Medina was Umm Kulthum, the young sister of Muhammad's son-in-law Uthman. She had been a Muslim for several years, and her family had never tried to lock her up for it; but she had decided to join the Muslim community in Medina.

"Don't send me back to the polytheists," she begged Muhammad. "They will lock me up and torture me, and I have no toleration for pain. You know that women are weak. I might deny my faith."

When Umm Kulthum's brothers arrived to claim her, in line with the Compact, Muhammad rejected their claim. "There is a new prophecy," he advised them. "Allah says that the clause in the Compact only concerns male people; He has cancelled the application to women. So when Muslim women immigrate to Medina, Allah forbids us to return them to Mecca."

Neither Umm Kulthum's family nor any other Quraysh ever challenged Muhammad about that. They were too exhausted to fuss about a few rebellious women. Therefore several more escaped to Medina over the following months, and they were all allowed to remain there. If they had been married, Muhammad returned their dowers to compensate their ex-husbands for the loss of their sex-lives.

No Medinan women ever ran away to Mecca. This was because Allah at this time commanded Muslim men to divorce any wives who were still polytheists. Umar divorced two that day. So non-

Muslim women had no need to “escape” from Medina; they were in fact being pushed out.

Several men wanted to marry the aristocratic Umm Kulthum, and Muhammad awarded her to his ex-son Zayd. This was a stern test of her faith, for Zayd did not attract her at all, but she was a true Muslim and she obeyed the Prophet.<sup>3</sup>

Then he dealt with the important matter: to give his warriors a real battle with lots of loot. He told them that they were going to Khaybar to tackle the Jews. Every man who had been at Hudaibiya gathered his weapons, and early in June 1,400 men and 200 horses set out. The men were excited and rowdy. At every hilltop they yelled, “Allah is greater!” until Muhammad had to remind them that Allah was not deaf.

A Ghatafan army of 4,000 marched out to help the Jews. Muhammad met them just outside Khaybar and he tried to bribe them to go home. Chief Pop-Eye\* refused to betray his allies.

Late that night Muhammad’s crier shouted: “Your people, your people in Hayfa! Help, help!” The alarmed Ghatafan ran back to their own territory to rescue their families from this alleged enemy. By the time they discovered it was all a trick, it was too late to relieve the Jews. Muhammad had halved his enemy’s army.

Khaybar, high in the mountains, was a ring of fortresses running sheer to the cliffs. Since its gates were never locked, the Muslims entered by night directly into its courtyard. Muhammad said they should not attack if they heard the call to dawn prayers. Dawn broke, and of course the Jewish city did not call to Islamic prayer.

At sunrise the Jews descended from their fortresses carrying shovels, hoes and baskets. When they saw the Muslims, they screamed: “Muhammad! Muhammad and his armies!” They turned tail and fled back into their fortresses.

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\* Pop-Eye was Umm Qirfa’s nephew.

“Allah is greater!” shouted Muhammad. “Khaybar is ruined. When we halt in a courtyard of a people whom we have warned, their future is misery.”<sup>4</sup>

Muhammad arranged his army outside Fort Naïm, but the Jews refused to emerge for a pitched battle; they fired arrows at the besiegers. They wounded fifty men, though Muhammad himself was surrounded by a human shield. Marhab, the owner of Fort Naïm, tossed down a millstone, and it landed on the head of Ibn Maslama’s brother. He took three days to die of it.<sup>5</sup>

The next day Muhammad handed his black banner to Ali with instructions not to give up until he had captured Fort Naïm. Ali, dressed in bright purple, stuck the banner in a pile of rocks near the fortress and shouted to the Jews: “Testify, ‘There is no god but Allah,’ or your lives and property are not safe!”

They called back, “We will not leave the covenant of Moses and the Torah!”

Marhab, a giant man who wore a carved stone as a helmet, emerged from the stronghold chanting doggerel.

*“I am Marhab: this you know.  
When the flames of battle glow  
I’m a champion, I’m a pro.”*

He killed the first Muslim who challenged him. Then Ibn Maslama urged: “Let me fight Marhab, for he killed my brother!”

They faced each other on each side of a tree. When one sheltered behind it, the other slashed at its branches until the tree was reduced to a bare trunk. Marhab surprised Ibn Maslama with a sword-thrust, which he took on his shield. Ibn Maslama slashed at both Marhab’s legs, and the giant hit the ground. Ibn Maslama shouted, “Taste death like my brother!” but before he could finish him off, Ali walked past and sliced off Marhab’s head.

Ali pulled at the front door, and it opened. All the Muslims swarmed into the fortress. Three more brothers of Marhab

challenged them to duels. Ibn Maslama killed the short one; Zubayr (under the eyes of his terrified mother) killed the next; and Ali killed the tall one by striking his legs. Other warriors were also killed, and by the end of the day, the Muslims had taken control of Fort Naïm.<sup>6</sup>

After that Muhammad attacked the fortresses and captured them one by one as he came to them. The Jews resisted him fiercely from inside their strongholds. It took three days to capture Fort Saab, which was full of food. This supplied the hungry Muslims for the rest of the war.

The Muslims killed any Jew who ventured into their range. A captive named Ghazzal pleaded for his life in exchange for information. "If you besiege Fort Qalaat a month," he advised Muhammad, "they won't care, for they have underground wells. If you block their water-supply, they will suffer."

Ghazzal showed them the water-sources, and the Muslims blocked them. After that the Jews were not able to remain thirsty, so they descended from their stronghold to confront the Muslims. The battle was fierce, and several from both sides were killed. The result was that the Jews were defeated and the Muslims took over Fort Qalaat.

Ghazzal then led Muhammad down a secret entrance to the dungeon, where they found among the arms a giant catapult and two battering-rams.

Muhammad was in no hurry to use the siege-engines as it was more useful to him to keep Khaybar's fortresses intact. Ghazzal had reported that the Jews were demoralised and living in fear, so perhaps the sight of the catapult was the reason why Fort Ubayy surrendered to Muhammad without putting up much of a fight.

At Fort Sumraan the warriors came down for duels; but after two Jews and a Muslim had been killed, the Muslims charged the door and forced an entry. The Jews fled the building, jumping the walls

like deer, until they reached Fort Nizar.

At the wall of Fort Nizar Ghazzal erected the catapult for Muhammad. The Jews fired arrows and rocks at the Muslims; one arrow caught Muhammad's cloak and hung down in it. When it became clear that both sides could keep fighting, and that the people in the fortress would suffer few casualties, Muhammad chose the quick end. He loaded the catapult and it was fired.

The boulders hit the walls. The fortress trembled. Then it sank to the ground. The Jews were stripped of their walls and exposed to the army, now slaves of the Islamic state. This was the only fort from which women and children were captured.

After this there was no more fighting. The sieges were a battle of wills between Muhammad and the Jews. When the Jews did not come down from the great Fort Qamus to fight, Muhammad erected the catapult there as well. Then he waited to see if they would surrender before he had to use it. Meanwhile, he also laid siege to Forts Watih and Sulalim.

It was two weeks before the Jews in Fort Qamus were certain that there was no escape from destruction.<sup>7</sup> The Jews surrendered, and Muhammad set the conditions. He granted them their lives and the clothes in which they stood up. They ceded their land, trees, buildings, weapons, money and all other property, hiding nothing from his grasp.

They persuaded him not to exile them to Syria. "We are experts in date-farming. Let us remain here to manage your property."

Since Muhammad had no slaves to farm Khaybar for him, he agreed to this. "You can keep half the harvests," he said, "and I'll expel you whenever I like."

When Watih and Sulalim joined the surrender, Muhammad was victorious over all of Khaybar. Ninety-one Jews and twenty Muslims had been killed. Ghazzal, the Jew who had informed against his people, spoke the words that made him a Muslim. Then

he and his wife walked out of Khaybar and were never seen again.

Muhammad sent the Muslims to collect up the booty from every fortress. They found camels, donkeys, cattle, sheep, goats, mail-coats, swords, spears, bows, quivers, furniture, timber, brass pots, ceramics, glassware, velvet, striped cotton, clothes, jewellery, barley, dates, butter, honey, alcohol (which they spilt) and manuscripts of the Torah. They set aside 20% for Muhammad and the rest – including the human slaves – was auctioned to the warriors.

It took two days to share out all of it. Muhammad decreed Hellfire for anyone who stole as much as a needle or sandal-thong outside of proper distribution. The Jews begged for the return of their Scriptures, which the illiterate Muslims tossed back to them.<sup>8</sup>

Muhammad searched the plunder for the fabulous jewels of the Abu'l-Huqayq family, which were hired out among the tribes for high-society weddings. When he did not find them, he called Kinana, the Nadir treasurer, and reminded him that his life was forfeit if anything had been hidden. Kinana swore on oath that all their treasures had been spent on the wars.

Muhammad did not believe him. He called Kinana's grand-uncle. After being tortured,\* the elderly man confessed that the jewels were buried in a nearby ruin. Muhammad sent his cousin Zubayr to dig them up. Zubayr brought back a camel-hide valise of jewellery, but Muhammad saw at once that half the collection was missing.

When Kinana refused to disclose where he had hidden the rest, Zubayr lit a firebrand and pushed it in Kinana's chest. Kinana still refused to talk, so Zubayr kept on stoking the fire. Kinana's flesh burned until he was nearly dead. When it was obvious that he could not talk any more, Muhammad allowed Ibn Maslama to cut off his head in revenge for his millstone-crushed brother.

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\* The exact type of torture is not specified.

Muhammad then ordered that Kinana's brother Rabi be tortured, but Rabi proved equally silent. When Rabi was also mutilated beyond the point of speech, Muhammad told another henchman, Bishr, to decapitate him.

He never found the remainder of the treasure.<sup>9</sup>

Kinana's widow had already been captured at Fort Nizar. Her beauty dazzled the Muslim warriors even before they realised they had caught the First Lady of Khaybar – for she was also the daughter of Huayy, the former Nadir chief. The angel-faced Dihya selected her as his share of the booty. Other men ran complaining to Muhammad that it was not fair that Dihya should have the best woman, so Muhammad ordered Bilal to bring this prize captive to him.

As soon as the girl stood before Muhammad, he threw his cloak over her, the public sign that she was now his property, and so she became his wife. He named her *Safiya* because she had been his *safi*, a word meaning “selection from the plunder”. He compensated Dihya by giving him seven camels and Safiya's two cousins.

The exquisite Safiya, who was only sixteen years old, charmed Muhammad so thoroughly that he trusted her up to his death-bed. Yet after his death, her unsurprising confession was: “I hated the Prophet more than anyone in the world, for he had killed my husband, my father and my brother.”<sup>10</sup>

After sunset prayers, Muhammad was ready to leave Khaybar, but before he could mount his camel, a girl named Zaynab presented him with a pot of roast lamb. She said it was a gift, then disappeared into the crowd. Muhammad called to a few of his companions to join him for dinner.

Five of the men put their hands in the dish. Muhammad hardly tasted his before he spat it out. “Drop it!” he warned. “This bone is poisoned!” His henchman Bishr turned green in the face, for he had already swallowed a bite. Someone fed a piece to a dog, which



ate it and died immediately.

Muhammad called Zaynab back and asked her, "Did you poison this sheep?"

"Yes," she said. "I wanted to kill you. You know what you did to my people. You killed my father, my uncle and my husband, and you took our property. I thought that if you were only an ordinary king, I would save everyone from you; and if you were a true prophet, poison would not harm you."

The Muslims shouted that they should kill her, but Muhammad forbade this. He forgave her in front of all the people.<sup>11</sup>

He journeyed home via Wadi'l-Qura so that he could also invite the Jews there to Islam. They refused to convert, so he besieged their settlement until he had destroyed it. They agreed to pay him half their produce in return for their lives. He appointed a Muslim governor and carried away their furniture and other possessions.

When the Jews in Fadak and Tayma heard of this, they too offered to send Muhammad half their produce if he would refrain from attacking them. There were no other significant Jewish settlements in Arabia; Muhammad now controlled all of them.

The Ghatafan returned to Khaybar to relieve the Jews and were astonished to find that the siege was already over. Why had a great city like Khaybar surrendered after only a month? Pop-Eye was warned by a sub-chief: "Didn't I tell you that it was a false alarm? Muhammad will surely be victorious over whoever is between the East and the West."<sup>12</sup>

Muhammad arrived back in Medina in mid-July with gifts of velvet, beads and brass pots for his womenfolk. He found that the last few Muslims exiled in Ethiopia had arrived there ahead of him, shipped at the Emperor's personal expense. Among them was his new wife, Abu Sufyan's daughter Umm Habiba. She was then 34 years old. It is not known whether she was blonde and blue-eyed like her brother Muaawiyah, but Muhammad agreed that she was attractive.

Umm Habiba remained devoted to Muhammad and assiduous in her correct practice of Islam, but he was never deeply attached to her.

When Abu Sufyan learned that his daughter had married his enemy, he was cynical. He said, "They deserve each other!"<sup>13</sup>

Muhammad claimed that the Emperor of Ethiopia had also written him a personal letter declaring that he was a Muslim and only wished he could come and live in Medina. However, nobody in Ethiopia ever noticed his conversion.

Answers to Muhammad's letters from some of the other neighbouring royalty arrived at this time.

The Governor of Egypt sent a polite, meaningless reply with an array of presents: five slaves, a white mule named Quickstep, a grey donkey named Dusty, a cloak, twenty fine garments and 1,000 gold coins. Since white mules were unknown in Arabia, Muhammad was very proud of Quickstep, whom he rode all over Medina. That was the end of the matter, for the Governor had no interest in Islam.

The angel-faced Dihya, who had carried the letter to the Emperor of Rome, reported: "He's interested. He met with his army-commanders in secret and invited them to obey Jesus truly by following this Prophet in Arabia. Unfortunately, the commanders were angry and ran for the doors, and when they found themselves locked in, they acted as if they would kill him. The Emperor had to pretend that he'd just been testing their faith. He doesn't dare follow you in public, but he's a secret Muslim." There is no Roman record that this test of faith ever occurred. It is more likely that the Emperor had refused to meet the obscure Arab merchant and that Dihya was lying to save his own face before Muhammad.

The Emperor of Persia tore up the letter.

The Ghassan chief on the Syrian border remarked, "If anyone threatened my country, I would invade his and take him prisoner."

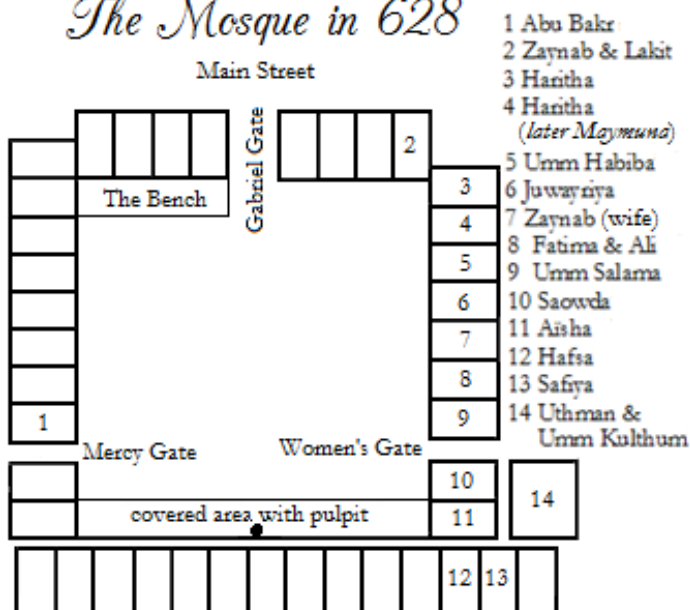
He evidently felt that a mere letter was no real threat, for he took no other action.

Worst of all, the high chief of Central Arabia replied that Islam was such a good idea that he too would like to be a prophet and share the profit. He and Muhammad could rule Arabia together!<sup>14</sup>

After Muhammad conquered Khaybar, he was rich, for he did not share land in the same way that he shared moveable plunder. He distributed 10% of Khaybar to himself, 10% to his wives, cousins and best friends, 30% to the Islamic state and 50% among the Muslim warriors and their horses.

“Now we’ll have enough to eat!” exclaimed Aisha. She was disappointed. Since the family remained hungry as often as not, they must have donated most of their income to the poor or to the Islamic army. Fatima and Ali also complained that their children were hungry. Aisha organised her co-wives into a lobby to beg Muhammad for money that would be truly their own. He firmly refused.

## The Mosque in 628



Muhammad spent some of his new wealth on renovating the mosque. He moved the north and west walls outward (Abu Bakr had to relocate his house in the process) until the courtyard was nearly twice its original size. To improve his audibility to his growing audience, he commissioned a slave to build him a tamarisk-wood pulpit, high enough to require two steps up to his seat. For Friday and festival prayers he wore a new black wool robe with nearly a quarter-metre (nine inches) of brocade at its cuffs, which he folded away as soon as prayers ended.<sup>15</sup>

He could now afford to equip a mercenary army, and the Jews were too weak to interfere with his plans. He could think realistically about conquering Mecca. He certainly did not want to wait out the ten years of cease-fire that the Compact of Hudaibiya required.

Umar helped out. He wrote to the Muslims stranded in Mecca about Muhammad's hint that Abu Basir would stir up war if he had enough men and advising them of Abu Basir's location. When Abu Jandal managed to steal out of Mecca, he fled to the Red Sea coast. Dozens of other Muslims also escaped, until Abu Basir had a crew of seventy men.

The gang soon demonstrated why their families wanted to lock them up. They killed every Quraysh traveller who passed their lair. Whenever they heard that a trading caravan was on its way to Syria, they lay in wait for it, ambushed the camels, killed the merchants and stole the merchandise. With deadly efficiency, they destroyed the Meccan leather trade, and the Quraysh became afraid of taking that route.

The cease-fire stipulated that the conditions applied to all allies on both sides. Yet the Quraysh did not dare accuse Muhammad of breaking the cease-fire; they pretended that he had no connection with Abu Basir.<sup>16</sup>

Instead, Abu Sufyan travelled to Medina to appeal for an end to the famine. "You say that Allah sent you as a mercy for all the world," he told Muhammad, "yet you have killed the fathers with

the sword and the children with hunger. You ordered us to keep good relations with kith and kin, yet your kinsmen have now perished.”

Muhammad sent some merchandise for the elders to Mecca with Amru al-Damri, the would-be assassin of Abu Sufyan. Some of the Quraysh were so unwilling to deal with Muhammad that they sent the goods straight back to Medina. Abu Sufyan announced that he would be keeping his share. He sent Muhammad some weapons and other goods, as either payment or a reciprocal gift. His patience was rewarded, for Muhammad sold him a consignment of sweet-dates to be distributed among the whole city. Abu Sufyan paid for them in Meccan leather.

Soon after this, Muhammad sent an order to Thumama, and Thumama stopped blockading Mecca.<sup>17</sup> Muhammad no longer needed to starve the Meccans. He had enough control over them through Abu Basir.

The final crime of Abu Basir's gang was to jump on a caravan of thirty camels and strip each merchant of thirty gold coins. The enraged Quraysh wrote a desperate letter to Muhammad.

We beseech you for Allah's sake and by the ties of kinship: summon those men to yourself and inform them that they may take refuge in Medina, for we do not want them.

As it happened, Abu Basir was too ill to travel, and he died with Muhammad's summoning letter in his hands. His seventy friends marched into Medina.<sup>18</sup> The humiliating clause that required Muhammad to return runaways to Mecca had been cancelled.

Defectors from Mecca could now travel freely to Medina, and scores of them did so. The Muslims attributed these conversions to the civilised debates that could occur under the cease-fire. However, many of the converts were violent young men who wanted to fight or pragmatic types who wanted to join the winning

team. It was obvious that the Quraysh were exhausted while Muhammad was stronger than ever.

Some of the conversions were helped along by bribery. One slave escaped to Medina in search of freedom. Muhammad had already accepted his allegiance when his master duly arrived in Medina to demand his property back. Muhammad settled the problem by buying his new friend: he swapped him for two black slaves whom he happened to have in his possession. After that he was careful to ask immigrants if they were free before accepting their allegiance.

He angled for the sympathy of Mecca's poor people by sending some money to be distributed among them. Abu Sufyan took the money with the sarcastic remark: "Nobody is more dutiful or generous toward his relatives than Muhammad! We fight and try to kill him while he sends us these lavish presents!"

Some of the noblemen refused to accept their share, which the messenger brought back to Medina. Muhammad asked him: "Why didn't you hand it over to those who did want it?"

However, the majority of converts were not Meccans. They were Bedouin tribes from all over the West. They converted for political reasons: because Muhammad had fought them or because they were afraid he might attack in the future. It was said that twice as many people converted to Islam in these eighteen months as in the previous fifteen years combined.<sup>19</sup>

That winter Muhammad sent out five more military expeditions, varying in size from 30 to 300 men. Three were against his old enemies the Ghatafan; and he apparently attacked the Hawazin and the Kilab to punish them for their past "plots" against him. The third Ghatafan raid was because the Ghatafan, after two unprovoked attacks, were planning a counter-attack against Muhammad. The Muslims never located the Hawazin, who were nomads living in the Taïf area, but they were victorious over the Kilab and the Ghatafan.

At one of the raids, Muhammad's ex-grandson, Usama, now aged seventeen, struck a Ghatafanite with his sword. The man exclaimed, "There is no god but Allah!" but Usama thought he was lying to save his skin so he killed him anyway. Muhammad rebuked him for this. "Usama," he said, "can you see into a man's heart?"

After the third raid, Pop-Eye was advised by the same sub-chief who had warned him before: "The time has come for you to abandon your plan. Muhammad has taken control of the land, and your position is nothing." Pop-Eye was discouraged by this unwelcome summary. When he heard that the Quraysh were also resigned to losing the war, he realised that everyone would have to convert to Islam before long.<sup>20</sup>

Among the disenchanted Muslims who fled back to Mecca was Abdallah Amir. Muhammad had started committing his prophecies to writing, and Abdallah was one of his clerks. Muhammad dictated an old Meccan prophecy:

*And certainly We created man of an extract of clay,  
Then We made him a small seed in a firm resting-place,  
Then We made the seed a clot,  
then We made the clot a lump of flesh,  
then We made the lump of flesh bones,  
then We clothed the bones with flesh,  
then We caused it to grow into another creation ...*<sup>21</sup>

"So blessed be Allah, the best of Creators!" exclaimed the clerk.

"Yes! Allah says those words too," Muhammad told him.

Abdallah wrote them down, and they are still in the Quraan to this day. Nevertheless, he was suspicious. His own words had been added to a divine prophecy, and he knew he was not a prophet. He wondered if Muhammad was making it all up, "for I can make up exactly the same sort of thing."

Another day, at Abdallah's suggestion, Muhammad allowed *all-knowing* instead of *all-powerful*, for "it's all the same." After several

experiences of finding that he could make Muhammad say whatever he liked, Abdallah was disillusioned. He stopped believing, abandoned Islam and returned to his family in Mecca. Muhammad's next prophecy included the words:<sup>22</sup>

*And who is more unjust than he ... who says, "I can reveal the like of what Allah has revealed"?<sup>23</sup>*

*He who disbelieves in Allah after his having believed ... on these is the wrath of Allah, and they shall have a grievous chastisement ... In the Hereafter they will be the losers.<sup>24</sup>*

In March it was time for Muhammad to claim the Quraysh tribe's promise that he might visit the Kaaba in Mecca. Before setting out, he asked his Uncle Abbas for the hand in marriage of Abbas's sister-in-law Maymuna. There is no obvious reason why he wanted this, for Maymuna was of no political importance and no great beauty. Muhammad most likely wanted some excuse to protract his visit to Mecca.

Muhammad brought 2,000 fully-armed men with him. Fearing that fights would erupt on the streets, the Quraysh elders cleared everyone out of the city to camp in the surrounding mountains. Only as they entered Mecca did the Muslims change into the white robes of pilgrims and reduce their weapons to one sword each. Muhammad was riding Slit-Ear, guided by a Comrade who proclaimed: "Get out of the way, infidel! This is Allah's Messenger and he is blessed!" They found the streets deserted except for a few elders huddled at the door of the town hall.

The Muslims kissed the Black Stone then trotted around the Kaaba at a fierce pace so that the elders would not think they had become weak. Since there was a shortage of camels, they sacrificed oxen. Then Muhammad shaved his head and entered the Kaaba. He was still sitting inside among the idols when Bilal climbed to its roof and shouted the call to the Islamic midday prayers. Suhayl covered his face at this blasphemy, and Ikrima thanked the gods that his father Mr Stupid had died before he could witness it.



According to the Compact, the Muslims stayed three days in Mecca. Muhammad pushed the boundaries by refusing to pack up on the fourth day. A delegation of elders reminded him, "Your time is up, so leave us!"

"It wouldn't hurt you," Muhammad bargained, "to let me stay and host my wedding feast here. You could be our guests."

"We don't want your food, so get out!"

The Muslims departed, taking Maymuna with them.<sup>25</sup>

Maymuna was a cousin of Abu Sufyan from the Hilal tribe. She had lived safely as a Muslim in Mecca with no thought of emigrating to Medina until her Prophet proposed to her. She then accepted him with great joy, and wealthy Uncle Abbas supplied her dower. Maymuna, who was 36, was obsessed with rules and rituals, by no means an independent thinker. She remained devoted to Muhammad; but to him, she was just one more wife among his collection.<sup>26</sup>

In April Muhammad made another assault against his inveterate foes the Sulaym. The Sulaym spies informed the tribe in time, and they called up their allies in time to outnumber the Muslim invaders. When the Muslim commander challenged them, "Convert to Islam, or we will fight you," they replied, "We don't want your Islam!" and rained a volley of arrows. The Muslims were defeated.<sup>27</sup>

On 3 June 629 the Quraysh cavalry-commander Khalid arrived in Medina. "The way has become clear," he said. "Muhammad is certainly a prophet, and I'm going to be a Muslim. How much longer should I delay?" Khalid, who was a cousin of Umar, boasted that he had never fought on the losing side of any battle, and he continued his military violence as a Muslim.<sup>28</sup>

From this time onward, Muhammad was frequently in pain. He blamed the drops of poison that he had swallowed from the roast lamb in Khaybar. He had himself bled but it made no difference.

Even worse were the sufferings of his friend Bishr, who had swallowed a whole mouthful. He was paralysed and could not even move in his bed without help. He existed like this for nearly a year before he died.

Muhammad then ordered that Zaynab the Poisoner should be brought to Medina and he handed her over to the judgment of Bishr's family. They put her to death and crucified her corpse.<sup>29</sup>

### Summary

- Muhammad broke the Compact of Hudaibiya by claiming that the returns-policy did not apply to women and by allowing a Muslim gang to rob Quraysh caravans. The Quraysh overlooked this.
- Muhammad invaded, defeated and plundered Khaybar, the home of his Jewish enemies. The Jews were forced to pay him tribute, which made him wealthy for the rest of his life.
- A Jewish woman tricked him into swallowing poison.
- The surrounding tribes became demoralised by Muhammad's constant raids and expected him to win the war. Large numbers of frightened or disaffected Arabs converted to Islam and joined Muhammad in Medina.
- As promised, the Quraysh allowed Muhammad to visit Mecca unmolested.

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### References and Notes to Chapter 13: *Khaybar*

1 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 507-508. Waqidi (Faizer) 307-308. Bukhari 3:50:891. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:90-91.

2 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 317. Waqidi (Faizer) 272. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:131. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 2:348.

3 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 509. Waqidi (Faizer) 310-311, 550. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:31-32; 8:162-163. Bukhari 3:50:891. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:92. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q60:10.

4 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 450, 510-511, 519, 522, 665. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 57. Malik 21:48. Waqidi (Faizer) 192, 312-314, 316, 320-321, 339. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:131-132, 135-137. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:42. Bukhari 1:8:367; 2:14:68; 4:56:840; 5:59:516. Muslim 8:3325, 3328; 19:4450. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:116-117.

- 5 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 511. Waqidi (Faizer) 317-319, 321-322. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:117.
- 6 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 511-514. Waqidi (Faizer) 318-319, 321-324. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:137-139. Bukhari 4:52:192, 253; 5:57:52; 5:59:520, 521. Muslim 19:4450; 31:5917, 5918, 5919. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:117, 119-121. This paraphrase of Marhab's poem is no worse than the original.
- 7 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 511-512, 515. Waqidi (Faizer) 318-319, 321, 324-332, 334-335. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:132. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:42, 45, 51. Bukhari 2:14:68. Abu Dawud 14:2698. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:117. Ghazzal was also known as Simak.
- 8 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 511-512, 515, 518, 525. Malik 21:25; 33:1. Waqidi (Faizer) 319, 327, 330, 334-336, 340. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:133-137, 139, 141-142. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:42-46, 48, 51. Bukhari 3:34:437; 3:39:531; 3:50:890; 4:53:380; 5:59:537, 541; 8:78:698. Muslim 1:209; 8:3325; 10:3760, 3863, 3864. Abu Dawud 14:2705; 19:3000, 3001, 3008, 3013; 22:3346, 3403, 3407. Nasāi 3:21:1961. Tirmidhi 1:12:1255. Ibn Maja 4:24:2848, 2854. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:117.
- 9 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 515. Waqidi (Faizer) 330-331. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:132-133, 137, 139-140. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:43-44, 47-48. Abu Dawud 19:3000. Tabari (Poonawala) 9:135. Bayhaqi 4#1576. The careful reader can, however, deduce the treasure's location, as I explained in my previous book, *Unveiled*.
- 10 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 511, 514-515. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 793-794 #918. Waqidi (Faizer) 332, 348-349. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:140, 145, 390; (Bewley) 8:86-91. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:44-45. Bukhari 1:8:367; 2:14:68; 3:12:2272; 3:34:437; 4:52:143; 5:52:143; 5:59:512, 522; 7:65:336; 8:75:374. Muslim 8:3325, 3328, 3329. Abu Dawud 19:2985, 2986, 2987, 2988, 2989, 2991, 2992. Nasāi 4:26:3382. Ibn Maja 3:9:1957. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:117; (Poonawala) 9:135; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:184-185. Bayhaqi 4 #1575, 1576. Haythami 9 #15379. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 3:271. Smith (1885, 1903) 105. Guillaume (1960) 54.
- 11 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 516. Waqidi (Faizer) 333-334. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:197; 2:143-144, 249-252. Bukhari 3:47:786; 4:53:394; 7:71:669. Muslim 26:5430, 5431. Abu Dawud 39:4495, 4496, 4498; 40:4496, 4497. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:123-124. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 3:283-287.
- 12 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 515-516, 523. Waqidi (Faizer) 332-333, 347-348. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:50-151, 157-158. Abu Dawud 19:2961.
- 13 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 510, 515-516, 526-530, 543. Waqidi (Faizer) 327, 334-335, 336, 338, 350, 390-391. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:133-135; (Bewley) 8:68-70. Muslim 4:1579, 1581; 31:6095. Abu Dawud 11:2102; 19:3010. Nasāi 2:67:1814; 4:66:3352. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:46. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:109-110 & f 467; (Poonawala) 9:133-134; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:177-179. Ibn Hajar, *Isaba* 7 #11185. Suyuti (Jarrett) 197, 202.
- 14 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 652-653, 655-658. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 788-789 #900. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:151, 304-309; (Bewley) 8:148, 149. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:132-133. Bukhari 1:3:64. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:98, 100, 104-106, 108, 111, 131; (Poonawala) 9:147; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:193-194. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 4:430-431. Henze (2000) 42.
- 15 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 521-524. Waqidi (Faizer) 339. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:141-142, 294-300; (Bewley) 8:42, 131. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:43, 45, 49. Bukhari 5:59:547; *Muḥṣad* 17:348. Muslim 4:1111; 9:3506, 3510. Abu Dawud 9:1712; 19:2061, 3000, 3006, 3008, 3009. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:131. Ariffin (2005) 50-53.
- 16 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 508. Waqidi (Faizer) 308-309. Bukhari 3:50:891. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:91.
- 17 Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 792 #915. Bukhari 6:60:297. Kister (1981).
- 18 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 508. Waqidi (Faizer) 308-309. Bukhari 3:50:891. Tabari (Fishbein)

8:91.

19 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 485, 507, 648. Waqidi (Faizer) 299, 307. Muslim 10:3901. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 4:486. Kister (1981).

20 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 660-662. Waqidi (Faizer) 355-360. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:146, 148-149. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:131-133.

21 Q23:12-14 (Shakir).

22 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 550. Waqidi (Faizer) 421. Abu Dawud 38:4345. Anon, *Tamwīr al-Miqbās* on Q16:106. Wahidi (Guezzou) on Q6:93. Qurtubi, *Tafsīr* on Q6:93. Ibn al-Athir (Lebanon) 3:154. Ibn Hajar, *Isaba* #4714.

23 Q6:93 (Shakir).

24 Q16:106, 109 (Shakir).

25 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 530-531. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 794 #918. Waqidi (Faizer) 360-364. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:150-153; (Bewley) 8:94. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:133-138; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:185-186. Ibn Hajar 3 #4050. *See* Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 566 and Waqidi (Faizer) 435 for the attitude of the Hilal tribe.

26 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 531. Malik 8:10:38; 25:6:16; 54:4:9, 10; 54:7:20. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 772 #782; 794 #918. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:466; (Bewley) 8:94-99, 317-318. Bukhari 1:4:209, 236, 237; 1:5:249, 257, 259, 260, 265, 266, 273, 275, 279; 1:6:300, 329; 1:8:376, 378; 1:9:496, 497; 2:24:569; 3:29:63; 3:31:210; 5:59:559; 7:65:303; 7:67:445, 446, 448. Muslim 3:579, 580, 620, 622, 632, 666, 704, 705, 707, 708, 709; 4:1002, 1003, 1004, 1041, 1392; 6:2498; 8:3284; 21:4790, 4791, 4792, 4796; 26:5545. Abu Dawud 26:3721; 27:3833. Nasāʾi 1:161:254; 5:26:4324. Tirmidhi 1:1:103; 3:23:1798. Ibn Maja 5:3610; 25:6:16; 54:7:20. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:136-137; 9:135; 39:185-186. Zamakhshari 5 #899 on Q33:51. Ibn Hajar, *Isaba* 3 #4050; 8 #11779; *Tabdhib* 12 #13898; *Bulugh* 1:10, 129, 130. Guillaume (1960) 54-55.

27 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 667. Waqidi (Faizer) 365. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:153. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:138.

28 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 485. Waqidi (Faizer) 326. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:143, 145. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 4:486.

29 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 516. Waqidi (Faizer) 334. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:197; 2:133, 251-252. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:445. Abu Dawud 39:4495, 4496, 4497, 4498, 4499.

## *The Year of Victory*

**June 629 – March 630**

Muhammad's goal was to dismantle the Compact of Hudaibiya so that he could invade Mecca. The Quraysh were faithful to the cease-fire, so Muhammad had to start the war himself.

In June 629 he sent out a squad of cavalry with written instructions to attack the Mulawwa clan. The raiders surprised the sleeping settlement at dawn, screaming, "Kill! Kill!" They killed men, took children prisoner and stole camels and goats. The Mulawwa pursued the thieves, but before they were close enough to fight, a flash-flood swept down, filling the valley between them. Nobody could cross the swirling torrent; although some of the stolen animals were swept away, the Muslims escaped with their captives.

It was a small and unremarkable raid except for one thing: the Mulawwa were a clan of the Bakr tribe. Since the Bakr were allies of the Quraysh, this was a clear breach of the cease-fire Compact of Hudaibiya. Yet the demoralised Quraysh never challenged Muhammad about his betrayal.<sup>1</sup>

He also sent a large raid against the Ghatafan, with orders to "show no mercy," which was business as usual; and he sent a smaller squad against his new enemies, the Hawazin. Men were killed, women were captured and camels were stolen. Later some Hawazin came to Medina to ransom the prisoners, and Muhammad returned most of them; but his squad-commander had already raped the prettiest girl, and she "chose" to remain with him as his concubine.<sup>2</sup>

It was eighteen months since Muhammad had conquered Dumat al-Jandal, so he decided it was time to threaten the north again.

He miscalculated. He sent fifteen men to raid the nomadic Christian tribes on the Syrian border. Although the Muslims found

a much larger group than they had expected, they stuck to their mission and invited them to Islam. The nomads replied with a volley of arrows. The Muslims fought back until they were killed. One man was only wounded; he played dead until it was safe to struggle back to Medina and inform Muhammad.

Muhammad was furious and wanted to launch a vengeance-strike; but he dropped the idea when he discovered that the nomads had moved on to an untraceable location.

The northern tribes made it clear that Muhammad's crimes would not be welcome in their territory. In the Syrian village of Muta, the Ghassan tribe captured a Muslim who was carrying a letter. Seeing that it was for their ally, the Governor of Basra, the Ghassanites demanded to know whether the courier was a Muslim. When the man freely admitted to being "a messenger from Allah's Messenger," the Ghassanites killed him.\*

Muhammad heard the news with dismay. It was followed by rumours that the huge Ghassan tribe were mobilising their cavalry to emphasise their point with a full-scale invasion of Medina. Alert for news of the attack, the community was sick with dread.<sup>3</sup> Muhammad lapsed into depression, partly because of the Ghassan threat and partly because of a stressful situation in his family.

His daughter Zaynab had just died at the age of about 33 from gynaecological complications.<sup>4</sup> Muhammad consoled himself by taking a new concubine. Mariya, a curly-haired beauty, had been part of the previous year's gift of slaves from the Governor of Egypt. Before long Muhammad was discovered with Mariya in Hafsa's bed. Hafsa told Aisha, who told everyone. The enraged wives formed a wrathful united front and demanded that he give her up. Being eager for harmony in his home, he rashly promised not to sleep with Mariya again. Then he announced a revelation

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\* We are not told what the letter said. If it was one of Muhammad's "convert or die" missives, the attitude of the Ghassan is understandable.

from Allah that his promise was cancelled.

*O Prophet!  
Why do you deny yourself what Allah has permitted you  
just to please your wives?  
Allah requires you to expiate your oaths.<sup>5</sup>*

Muhammad therefore had a moral duty to continue sleeping with Mariya. The prophecy continued with a word to the wives:

*It may well be that if he divorces all of you,  
Allah will find him new wives  
both widows and virgins.<sup>6</sup>*

The wives were unrepentant; so for the next month Muhammad refused to speak to any of them. He spent the whole time in the attic of his neighbour Haritha's house, with only Mariya for company. Although he still led communal prayers five times a day, he retreated to Haritha's attic as soon as they were finished. The Muslims dared not approach him and he denied all audiences.

For the men in the mosque courtyard, it was a political crisis. Muhammad had no plan for dealing with the Ghassan. The Quraan was not being revealed, and lawsuits were not being judged.

The crisis passed. Muhammad eventually emerged from Haritha's attic and offered his wives a choice: they could be divorced with a handsome settlement and risk going to Hell, or they could remain with him in obedience and go to Heaven. All the wives chose to remain with him. To add to their humiliation, Mariya was pregnant. She was the first woman since Khadija whom Muhammad had impregnated.<sup>7</sup>

The Ghassan had still not arrived in Medina, so Muhammad took the initiative and declared open *jihad* on them. He appointed his ex-son Zayd as commander over a great army of 3,000, with instructions to invite the Ghassan tribe to Islam and to attack if they refused. They must swear to any treaties in their own names, for they might need to break those promises later; they ought not

to break treaties that had been sworn in the name of Allah or His Messenger. In September 629 Zayd marched out to Syria.

As the army reached the Damascus region, the Ghassan heard of their advance. They had time to muster reinforcements and to call on their ally the Roman Emperor, and their legions prepared together to confront the army of the infamous Muhammad. They sent a scout to spy out the Muslims; but the Muslims captured and killed him.

Zayd's army was intimidated by their first glimpse of their opposition. They claimed there were 100,000 Romans and 100,000 Arabs, a breathtaking array of horses, swords, quivers, brocade, silk and gold. Zayd withdrew his troops to the village of Muta to reconsider their options; but the Romans followed them there. Reasoning that victory and Heaven were both good options, the Muslims accepted that they had to fight.

In the hopeless battle, Zayd was soon speared to death. His second- and third-in-command were also killed, so the Muslims elected the new convert Khalid as their new commander.

The next day Khalid swapped around his left and right wings and his front and rear guards. Since the enemy did not recognise the banners and positions, they thought Muhammad had sent reinforcements. For a while they were warded off, and Khalid was able to renew the Muslim assault. Naturally the Roman-Arab alliance was not fooled for long, and the Muslims were routed. Khalid's achievement was to retreat quietly, so that the Romans gave up the pursuit and most of the Muslim army escaped alive.

When the defeated army neared Medina, angry Muslims pelted dirt at them and jeered, "Deserters! You fled from Allah's path!"

Muhammad intervened with a public notice. "They are not deserters but, if Allah wills, charge-againers! As for Khalid, he showed himself to be a true commander," and from that day, Muhammad called him "Allah's Unsheathe Sword".



Muhammad, who had forbidden wailing at funerals, wept inconsolably over Zayd. When he was questioned about it, he said, "I am pining because I loved Zayd."<sup>8</sup>

Despite this crushing defeat, Muhammad continued to attack the northern tribes. The next month he announced that the Baliy tribe was planning an attack on Medina. He sent an army of 500 to the Syrian border, with instructions to enlist as allies any tribes that they passed on their route. Despite the large numbers of northern tribesmen who were rumoured to be gathering, the offensive against Medina turned out to be imaginary, for the nomads dispersed as they heard of the Muslims' advance. It was only in the furthest outposts of Baliy territory that the Muslims met any people, who fired arrows at them but fled as soon as the Muslims counter-attacked. The Muslims stole some camels and goats and returned home claiming they had conquered the territory.

November was a sacred month, but this did not prevent Muhammad from sending 300 men to the sea-coast to raid another northern tribe. However, they were unable to locate their prey, and they returned to Medina without fighting.

In December Muhammad claimed that a Hawazin clan was plotting against Medina. He sent three spies to observe their camp. When they caught the clan chief wandering out alone, they shot him through the heart, cut off his head and yelled, "Allah is greater!" Not realising that there were only three Muslims, the Hawazin ran for their lives, leaving their camels and goats for the spies to herd off.

He also sent a small troop to attack the Ghatafan. They ambushed a large settlement, killing any man who approached them, and they returned to Medina with four women, several children, 200 camels and 1,000 goats. The troop-commander chose for himself a doe-eyed girl who could not stop weeping. Then Muhammad ordered him to hand her over because she was required as a gift for Muhammad's treasurer (who was the brother of his wife

Maymuna).<sup>9</sup>

At this time the people in Mecca helped Muhammad by breaching the Compact of Hudaibiya. The Bakr tribe, allies of the Quraysh, were thoroughly sick of never receiving justice when they were attacked. They wrote satires about Muhammad. A Bakrite sang one in public. A Khuza'a boy, since the Khuza'ites were allies of the Muslims, attacked the singer and smashed his head. The man staggered to his friends and showed off his injury. The Bakrite demanded compensation, and the Khuza'ites did not pay.

Since nobody had actually died, this should have been a small matter. However, it was the last straw for the Bakr. A couple of years earlier, the Khuza'a had robbed and murdered a merchant under Bakr protection. The Bakrites had retaliated by killing a Khuza'ite. The Khuza'ites had counter-retaliated by killing three Bakr princes. Then the Compact of Hudaibiya had intervened, and the princes had never been avenged.

After the assault on the Bakr poet, the Bakr knew they must take care of themselves. It would be no good asking Abu Sufyan to break the Compact, but they appealed to other elders. Some Quraysh lent them weapons and a few even volunteered to join the fight. The Bakrites surprised the Khuza'ites by night at their well. They fought until they had driven the Khuza'ites into the sacred area and killed twenty men. At dawn their corpses lay around the Kaaba, so the crime could not be hidden.

The Compact of Hudaibiya was annulled, and Muhammad was no longer bound to keep peace with the Quraysh.<sup>10</sup>

Abu Sufyan raced to Medina with two camels and only one servant to plead for a restoration of the cease-fire. He found that the Khuza'ites had reached Muhammad ahead of him, bearing tales that the Quraysh had refused to pay them blood-money. In fact there was no way that Abu Sufyan would have refused blood-money when the alternative was war with Muhammad. If the Khuza'ites had asked for anything, they must have asked the wrong

people.

Forewarned, Muhammad told Abu Sufyan that the terms of the Compact could not be changed. Abu Sufyan humbled himself before everyone who was anyone in Medina – his daughter Umm Habiba, Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali and Fatima – and they all refused to help him. As Ali said, “Once Allah’s Messenger has determined something, it is useless to discuss it with him.”<sup>11</sup>

What Muhammad had determined was to be at war with Mecca. Though Mecca was no threat to Medina and though Muhammad had no natural right to possess it, yet he had never lost sight of his original plan. Islam was to rule the Kaaba and Islam’s Prophet was to rule Mecca. He finally had the men and money to equip an army, and there was no longer a compact of cease-fire obstructing his pathway.

Muhammad ordered his men to prepare for a great expedition to Mecca, praying: “O Allah, make the Quraysh blind and deaf, so that we may surprise them.” He collected an army of over 9,000, including his allies from the Asad, Juhayna, Khuza’a, Muzayna, Qays and Tamim tribes and even a renegade branch of the Bakr. They set out on the afternoon of 4 January 630.

Half way to Mecca they met Muhammad’s Uncle Abbas. He had recognised that Mecca had no chance of defeating Muhammad this time and so he was on his way to Medina to become a Muslim voluntarily before he was forced to it. Muhammad was overjoyed when Abbas fell in line with the Islamic army.

At the next halt a contingent of 700 of the Sulaym tribe approached Muhammad. They declared themselves Muslims and offered themselves as the vanguard of his army, so ensuring that when Muhammad won the *jihad*, they would not be his next target. Even Pop-Eye turned up with a very small group of the Ghatafan.<sup>12</sup>

At twilight on 11 January they set up camp near Mecca. The Quraysh had no idea that they were on their way. Uncle Abbas

rode out on Quickstep to warn them to surrender. On the way he met Abu Sufyan, who, fearing the worst, was out in the dark scouting for trouble. Abbas told his friend, "Muhammad is here with an army of ten thousand. If he captures you, he will cut off your head, so come now and ask for protection."

When Abbas brought Abu Sufyan to Muhammad's tent, Umar cried, "It's Allah's enemy! Let me behead him!"

"He's under my protection," said Abbas.

"Abu Sufyan," said Muhammad, "isn't it time that you recognised that there is no god but Allah?"

"If any other gods existed," replied Abu Sufyan, "they would have helped me before now."

"Isn't it time that you recognised that I am Allah's Messenger?"

"I still have some doubt about that."

"Submit," warned Abbas, "before you lose your head."

Abu Sufyan said the words.<sup>13</sup>

In the morning Muhammad divided his vast army into four. Zubayr, Khalid, Ali and Muhammad were each to invade Mecca from one of the four entrances. This was effectively an ambush of the whole city: every exit would be blocked.

Abu Sufyan arrived ahead of the army with Muhammad's warning to surrender. "People of the Quraysh, Muhammad has arrived with an army that we cannot withstand. He says that whoever enters his house and lays down his weapons is protected!"

His wife Hind ran up to him and yanked his moustache, crying, "Kill this fat greasy bladder of lard! What a rotten protector of the people!"

"Alas, don't let her fool you! You cannot avoid your fate. I have seen the army! Only if you stay indoors or in the Kaaba will you be safe."

A few desperate resisters, Quraysh, Bakr and Hudhayl, rallied behind Ikrima to block the north-eastern pass into Mecca. There they met Khalid's cavalry. They fired arrows, slashed swords and screamed, "You'll never force your way in!" but it was a very short battle. Khalid charged the Ikrima's men and flattened them. Twenty-eight polytheists were killed, along with three Muslims; the rest fled.

Another horde of Meccans had also gathered in the streets to assess whether it would be worth their while to resist the invaders. Muhammad's cavalry saw them as they entered from the north-west. At his signal they charged through the streets, killing whomever their swords met.

Abu Sufyan pushed his way through the scattering mob until he reached Muhammad and tendered Mecca's formal surrender.

Muhammad instructed his warriors to stop fighting. Fourteen personal enemies were to be killed even if they surrendered; otherwise, the Muslims were to attack only those who resisted them. That did not leave anyone for, as Abu Sufyan yelled at them not to commit suicide, the throngs all rushed to their homes and bolted themselves inside. They picked up all the weapons still left inside the houses and threw them out of the windows for the Muslims to take.<sup>14</sup>

Muhammad, wearing a black turban, and his ex-grandson Usama rode Slit-Ear through the deserted streets until they reached the Kaaba.

Muhammad had won. He owned the city of Mecca; its residents were, by right of conquest, his slaves; and he could make it Islamic. He proclaimed, "Allah is greater!" Then he circled the Kaaba seven times, touching the Black Stone with a stick each time he passed it. He stabbed at Hubal's eye, then at all 360 of the idols, and toppled them one after the other like dominoes.

Alighting from Slit-Ear, he called for the key and entered the inner

sanctuary of the temple. He picked up a wooden dove, snapped it in his hands and tossed the pieces away. After Bilal had called the people to midday prayers, Muhammad stood at the door, slid the key into his sleeve, and made his victory speech.

“There is no god but Allah! He has kept His promises and granted victory to His army. O Quraysh, Allah has taken from you the arrogance of worshipping many gods and your own ancestors. Nobody will be punished, for Allah is most merciful. O Quraysh, I set you free.”

He was too shrewd to provoke their resentment by keeping them as slaves or pillaging their property. It was more useful to him that they should pay him taxes and military service voluntarily. He had made the cost of disloyalty so high that he could afford to bet that pivotal people like Abu Sufyan had more incentive to adapt to the change of government and remain loyal to him.

After leading the prayer, he ordered all the idols around the Kaaba to be collected. One by one they were ceremonially smashed and thrown onto a bonfire. After afternoon prayer he invited the Khuza’a tribe to take revenge on the Bakr. They attacked for one hour.

Muhammad swore that polytheists from other tribes would be permitted to worship at the Kaaba and that their safety during the pilgrimage month was guaranteed. However, anyone who wished to continue living in Mecca was required to convert to Islam. That afternoon he sat on Safa Hill while people lined up to declare their faith and swear allegiance to him.

Mr Stupid’s daughter muttered, “We will pray the Islamic prayers but we will never love the man who killed our friends!”

Other “converts” lamented, “I wish I had died before I heard Bilal braying on top of the Kaaba!” or, “Thank the gods that my father didn’t live to see this!”

Abu Sufyan hinted, “I won’t say anything because these stones

would tattle to Muhammad.”<sup>15</sup>

At dawn the next day Muhammad was confronted by his cousin Fakhita, who had been his first love long ago. She complained that her brother Ali had tried to force his way into her house to kill two of her relatives and that she had bolted her door on them for their own safety.

Muhammad received her graciously. “Welcome, dear Fakhita! We grant protection to whomever you grant protection. Ali must not kill them.” Fakhita’s husband Hubayra was nowhere in sight. He had fled Mecca rather than convert to Islam. Since this meant that they were automatically divorced, Muhammad asked her, “Will you marry me?”

Her refusal was diplomatic. “I loved you when we were polytheists, so how much more in Islam! But I couldn’t do justice both to a husband and to all my children. Besides, I am old and I would be a burden to you.”<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, Muhammad did find a new wife. A Bakr clan who had fought with Ikrima against Khalid’s cavalry became nervous and felt the need to appease the conqueror. They boasted that their family had a very young girl of extraordinary, radiant beauty and that Muhammad was welcome to her. Muhammad accepted their peace-offering and married the pretty Mulayka.<sup>17</sup>

He had to settle a theft case. A girl was brought to him by witnesses who had caught her red-handed lifting a traveller’s bag. They said she had a past history of stealing jewellery. She was not a desperate beggar, but Fatima Makhzum, from the wealthiest clan in Mecca (and the clan most hostile to Muhammad). Muhammad decreed that her hand must be cut off.

The Muslims were horrified. They petitioned his ex-grandson Usama to intercede for Fatima, “for Usama is the favourite of Allah’s Messenger. Who else would dare?” Muhammad’s wife Umm Salama, who was also from the Makhzum clan, tried to hide

Fatima in her tent, but Muhammad called her out.

He challenged the soft-hearted people: "Are you asking me to violate Allah's command? There is no choice. Nations have gone astray for pardoning a noble person where they would punish a poor one. Even if my own daughter stole, I would cut off her hand like anyone else's."

At evening prayers Fatima's right arm was laid on the block, and in the presence of the congregation her hand was sliced off. She left with her stump dripping blood.<sup>18</sup>

As for the fourteen personal enemies whom Muhammad had condemned to death, five had already been caught and killed. Two were murderers and apostate Muslims; one had committed a lesser assault; and two had sung satires about Muhammad. Abu Sufyan then intervened to beg for mercy for the survivors. Muhammad recognised that the conquest had succeeded and that these enemies were no longer a threat to him, so he reprieved as many as would convert to Islam.

Three other singers, a servant who had couriered an incriminating letter and another man guilty of assault all in due course declared Islam and were pardoned. Abu Sufyan's wife Hind and Mr Stupid's son Ikrima, guilty of political offences, also claimed to have converted. Although Hind argued with every clause of the pledge, and Ikrima was only awaiting a convenient moment to oppose him again, Muhammad accepted them as Muslims. They did not cause any more trouble in his lifetime. Wahshi, the javelinist who had killed Uncle Hamza, fled to the neighbouring city of Ta'if.

The fourteenth criminal was Abdallah Amir, the apostate clerk who had accused Muhammad of inventing the Quraan. He hid with Muhammad's son-in-law Uthman, who was his foster-brother, until the situation in Mecca had calmed down. Then Uthman took him to Muhammad to beg, "Release him to my custody!"



There was a long silence, in which Muhammad kept turning his face away while Uthman kept trying to hold his gaze. The Muslims standing around waited for a signal that never came. Finally Muhammad said, "Yes."

As soon as Uthman had taken Abdallah away, Muhammad demanded, "Why didn't one of you behead that dog?"

They protested, "We were waiting for your signal!"

"A prophet," he informed them, "does not kill by signalling."

Thanks to their misunderstanding, Muhammad had given his word, and so Abdallah survived. To be on the safe side, he reconverted to Islam; and he never voiced disbelief again.<sup>19</sup>

Having secured Mecca, Muhammad's next task was to conquer the surrounding nomadic tribes for Islam.

He sent his henchmen to the major temples with instructions to smash the idols and attack any non-Muslims. The Hudhayl idol of Suwaa was destroyed. The Mustaliq idol of Manat was destroyed. Unfortunately, the treasuries of both shrines were empty. The Daows idol of Dhu'l-Kaffayn was burned. Khalid led thirty cavalry to Nakhla, where Muhammad in his polytheistic days had sacrificed, and destroyed the idol of Al-Uzza. Then he reported that "nothing much" had happened.

Muhammad had forgotten to tell Khalid that there had been more than a stone statue to destroy. He sent him back to Nakhla to do the job properly. This time, when Khalid drew his sword, the custodian of the shrine cried out to Al-Uzza to kill Khalid. A black, scatter-haired woman, naked except for jewellery, emerged wailing. Khalid sliced her in two halves and pillaged her jewellery. This time Muhammad was satisfied. He said that the woman had been Al-Uzza Herself, wailing because She would never be worshipped again.

Then he sent detachments to the nomads' camps to invite people to Islam. It was not a *jihad*: people were only to be killed if they

failed to convert.

Khalid went with 350 warriors to the Jadhima, a tribe that, many years earlier, had killed his uncle. He found them at their wells. They claimed to be Muslims. “We have converted! We bless and trust Muhammad; we have built a mosque and we pray in it. We only carry weapons in case Islam’s enemies attack us.”

Khalid ordered them to lay down their arms. One man warned them not to surrender, “for this is Khalid.” They shouted him down and forced the sword out of his hand. As soon as they were all disarmed, Khalid tied them up and allocated each captive to a Muslim guard for the night.

A young captive, who admitted that he was not a Muslim, begged his guard to lead him to the women. There he addressed his girlfriend. “Farewell, Hubaysha, for life is over!

*Say, did I not deserve thee? I travelled night and noon!  
Reward me with thy love before mischance divides us soon.  
Our vows constrained me truly; no other could I see;  
when tribal woes distracted, my mind was stayed on thee.”*

Hubaysha replied, “And you – may you live for twenty-five years!”

In the morning Khalid ordered each warrior to kill his man. Nearly thirty Jadhima men had been killed before a warrior reminded Khalid: “Fear Allah! We are not allowed to kill a community of Muslims.” The rest then released their captives. Hubaysha threw herself down on her lover’s corpse and kept kissing him until she died beside him.

Muhammad was angry with Khalid for attacking Muslims. He prayed in public, “O Allah, I am innocent before Thee of what Khalid has done!” He borrowed cash from the rich men in Mecca and sent Ali to the Jadhima to pay blood-money for the dead. That was the end of the matter. There was no question of punishing an army-commander as talented as Khalid.<sup>20</sup>

The Hawazin tribes were alarmed. When Muhammad’s army first

left Medina, they had believed he intended to attack them again. When they saw that his target was Mecca, they still assumed that he would invade them next. They were not reassured by the way he was terrifying their neighbours into Islam. They collaborated with their allies, the Tha'if in Ta'if, and decided to strike at Muhammad together before he struck them.

Muhammad heard that they had mobilised their army, so he too decided to strike first. The addition of 2,000 Meccans now brought his army to a total size of 12,000. They marched out in the direction of the Hawazin and reached Hunayn Valley on 3 February 630.

As the Muslims descended the valley at dawn, the Hawazin jumped out and ambushed them with a shower of arrows. The Muslims panicked, broke ranks and fled, pushing one another out of the way while their camels bumped into one another. Abu Sufyan snorted, "They'll run straight into the sea!"

Fortunately for Muhammad, some of the Meccans were already reasoning, "I would rather be ruled by a Quraysh man than a Hawazin." When the powerful voice of Uncle Abbas commanded them to return to the fray, the Muslims – who outnumbered the Hawazin three to one – regrouped and began to fight. Muhammad, wearing two coats of mail, stood up in his stirrups on Quickstep's back and remarked, "Now the oven is hot!"

Muhammad threw a handful of pebbles at the Hawazin. A black cloud seemed to fall from the sky and burst open between the two armies, and suddenly the valley floor was crawling with black ants. The Hawazin fled without looking back. The Muslims killed whomever they could, and the Hawazin were routed. A Muslim woman cried, "Allah's cavalry have beaten Al-Lat's!"

The victorious Muslims scooped up the civilian prisoners. The Hawazin commander, Malik, had foolishly placed the non-combatants directly behind the battle-lines, assuming that this would inspire the men fight to the death in their defence. Now the 6,000 women and children, 24,000 camels, 40,000 goats and

160,000 silver coins were the property of the Islamic state. Muhammad sent them on to Jirana near Mecca for safekeeping; he had no time to distribute the loot, for he needed to wreak a swift revenge on the Thaḳif. Of course, he might have decided to attack Ṭāʾif next anyway; but the ambush at Hunayn settled the matter.<sup>21</sup>

The army camped at the walls of Ṭāʾif. A naked witch awaited them there, ready to cast spells against them. The Muslims could not barge into the city because the Thaḳif had already locked the gates against them, so Khalid directed a siege against its walls.

The Thaḳif rained down arrows like a cloud of locusts. After eleven Muslims had been shot dead, Abu Bakr's son had received a mortal foot-wound and Abu Sufyan had lost an eye, Muhammad moved his camp back out of arrow-range.

On the fourth day of the siege, the Daows tribe, which had first converted to Islam ten years earlier, finally contributed to the *jihad*-effort. They arrived at Ṭāʾif with a catapult and two battering-rams. Salman the Persian warned that it would be a long siege if they did not erect the catapult; so they set it up and fired double-pronged thorn-branches all around the fortress. The Thaḳif flung rocks back down at them.

Muhammad bribed Ṭāʾif's under-class. He promised instant freedom to any slave who defected to the Islamic army. Nearly twenty slaves crept out of Ṭāʾif and volunteered to be Muslims.

The Muslims crawled under a leather-covered battering-ram toward the fortress wall. Before they could breach it, the Thaḳif hurled blazing scraps of iron at them, burning the ram and forcing the ram-operators who survived the flames jump out from under it and scatter. The Thaḳif followed up with arrows and killed some of them.

Muhammad retaliated with an order to cut down the Thaḳif grapevines and torch them. The Muslims devastated several vineyards, but they stopped when the Thaḳif reminded them that they might

be destroying their own plunder.

After nearly three weeks Abu Bakr confessed that he did not believe they could capture Taïf at this stage; and Muhammad admitted that he did not believe it either. He gave orders to break the camp.<sup>22</sup>

He distracted his humiliated troops by stopping in Jirana to divide the plunder from the Hunayn Ambush. From his own 20% share he apportioned camels by the hundred to bribe new converts like Abu Sufyan and Pop-Eye.

His old allies the Comrades complained that he had not given them anything “although our swords are still dripping with the enemy’s blood.”

Muhammad had to soothe them with assurances of his love. “Why are you upset that other people take camels and goats while you have Allah’s own prophet living among you?”<sup>23</sup>

He also distributed the slaves. Uthman’s war-captive hated him, but he raped her as soon as she had menstruated. Zubayr, Abdalrahman, Saad Zuhra and several others did the same. However, two of the men had scruples: since their captives’ husbands were still alive, did raping them count as adultery? Muhammad replied with an old prophecy,

*Forbidden to you are ... all married women,*

to which he made a reassuring addition:

*except those whom your right hands possess.*<sup>24</sup>

The right hand held the sword, so the “right-hand possession” was a war-captive. Since their marriages had been annulled at the moment of their capture, the Hawazin women were available to be raped.<sup>25</sup>

They had been distributed for over ten days when a deputation of Hawazin men arrived in Jirana. They were willing to convert to Islam; but since Muhammad also had their animals and money,

they had nothing to finance the ransom of their families.

“You know very well what disaster has befallen us,” they pleaded, “so have pity on us for Allah’s sake!”

“Whom do you love more,” asked Muhammad, “your women and children or your animals?”

“Is this a choice between our animals and our honour? Give us our women and children, for they are what we love most!” The despoiled but reunited Hawazin accepted back their families and took the oath of allegiance to Islam.

“Where is Malik?” asked Muhammad. On being informed that the Hawazin army-commander was hiding in Taïf, Muhammad promised: “If he converts to Islam, I’ll give him his family, his money and a hundred camels.”

When Malik heard of this bribe, he crept out of Taïf by night and surrendered to Muhammad. Muhammad appointed him governor over the conquered territory surrounding Taïf. Before long the neighbouring Bedouin tribes were also filtering in to swear allegiance to Muhammad.

He also appointed a governor and two teachers over Mecca – for he had no thought of settling in Mecca as King. Although he had spent twenty years plotting to take over the Kaaba, he had lost the desire to dwell in its shadow. He had long since made his home among his staunchest supporters in Medina.<sup>26</sup>

### **Summary**

- Muhammad broke the Compact of Hudaibiya by deliberately attacking a Bakr clan. However, the Quraysh ignored it.
- He attacked the northern tribes on the Syrian border. The Roman Emperor retaliated by sending a huge army, which defeated Muhammad’s forces at Muta.
- The Compact of Hudaibiya ended when the Bakr tribe, allies

of the Quraysh, attacked the Khuza'a tribe, allies of Muhammad.

- Muhammad invaded Mecca with an army of 10,000, including last-minute enlistments from the Sulaym and Ghatafan tribes. Abu Sufyan, after being “converted” at sword-point, declared surrender. Muhammad destroyed the idols in the Kaaba and declared Mecca to be a Muslim city.
- Muhammad destroyed all the temples in the area around Mecca. The polytheists converted to Islam at swordpoint. The Hawazin tribe tried to halt his progress, but he defeated them at Hunayn.
- The only setback was his failure to capture the neighbouring city of Ta'if.

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#### References and Notes to Chapter 14: *The Year of Victory*

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2 Waqidi (Faizer) 371. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:156-157; (Bewley) 3:71. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:143.

3 Waqidi (Faizer) 370, 372. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:158-159. Bukhari 3:43:648; 6:60:435; 7:62:119; 7:72:734. Muslim 9:3508. Tirmidhi 5:44:3318. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:143.

4 Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:319; 8:24. Muslim 20:4593. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:139; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:4, 163.

5 Q66:1-2. *See also* Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:137.

6 Q66:5.

7 Q33:28-34; 66:3-4. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:152; (Bewley) 8:48-49, 59, 124-125, 134-138, 140, 149. Bukhari 1:8:395; 3:31:134; 3:43:648; 5:44:3318; 6:60:434, 435; 7:62:119, 130; 63:192, 193; 7:63:192; 7:72:734; 8:78:682; 9:86:102. Muslim 6:2387; 9:3496, 3497, 3506, 3507, 3508, 3509, 3511. Nasā'i 4:36:3410, 3411. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:131; (Poonawala) 9:38-39, 147; (Juynboll) 13:58; (Landau-Tasseron) 39:194. Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 4:431. Guillaume (1960) 55.

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10 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 540-542. Waqidi (Faizer) 384-386. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:165-166. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:60.

11 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 542-544. Waqidi (Faizer) 387, 390-391. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:166. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:61-62. *See* Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 189.

12 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 544-547, 557. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 773 #797. Waqidi (Faizer) 392, 394-396, 400, 403-404. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:363-365, 391-392; 2:165-166, 170, 172, 176.

Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:62, 66.

13 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 546-547. Waqidi (Faizer) 401-403. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:167. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:62-63.

14 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 547-550. Waqidi (Faizer) 405-406. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:167-168, 173-174. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:63-66. Abu Dawud 19:3016. Tabari (Fishbein) 8:176. Ibn Rashid (Anthony) 48 sets the Meccan casualties at 4 Quraysh and over 50 Bakrites.

15 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 552-553, 597, 617. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 774 #806. Waqidi (Faizer) 409-411, 413, 416-417, 439. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:167-169, 173, 175-177. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:66, 68. Muslim 5:2307; 7:3147. Abu Dawud 19:3017.

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24 Q4:24 (Shakir). *See also* Q23:1, 5-6.

25 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 566, 576. Waqidi (Faizer) 436, 450, 462. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:185, 188. Bukhari 5:59:626. Muslim 5:2308, 2309; 8:3251, 3432, 3433 & introduction to Chapter 8. Abu Dawud 11:2150, 2153; 14:2495. Nasai 4:26:3335, 3369. Tirmidhi 2:6:1132; 5:44:3016, 3017. Tabari (Poonawala) 9:2, 20. Ibn Hajar, *Bulugh* 11:1327.

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## *The Year of Deputations*

### **March 630 – April 631**

Muhammad arrived home in Medina on 21 March 630. He brought with him several of the Quraysh leaders who had converted to Islam. He felt more comfortable when his former enemies were living under his nose.

He soon realised that he could trust Abu Sufyan, who recognised that accepting the change of government and working in Muhammad's service was the only way to regain any of his lost power or status. He was loyal to Muhammad as long as they lived.

His son Muaawiyah asked to work as Muhammad's clerk. Since Muhammad was still more or less illiterate, he was always looking for people to read out loud to him, to write up his letters and contracts or to record his prophecies. At first Muaawiyah found it difficult to remember that he was no longer a prince in Mecca but a humble employee. One day Muhammad called him but Muaawiyah finished his meal before obeying the call. Muhammad cursed, "May he always be hungry!" Muaawiyah claimed that the curse came true, for he usually ate seven meals a day.

Uncle Abbas also brought his family to Medina and built himself a house on the prime real estate in the mosque wall.<sup>1</sup>

A convert from the Kilab tribe had distinguished himself at the siege of Taïf, and Muhammad rewarded him by agreeing to marry his pretty daughter Fatima.<sup>2</sup> This brought his household to its maximum size of eleven wives and two concubines; although its composition continued to fluctuate, it no longer increased.

In April Muhammad's Egyptian concubine Mariya gave birth to a son. With great joy Muhammad announced from his pulpit: "A boy was born last night, and I have named him after my ancestor Ibrahim."

When Ibrahim was a week old, Muhammad sacrificed a goat, shaved his head, weighed his hair and gave away the same weight of silver in charity to the poor.

At first Ibrahim was wet-nursed by a blacksmith's wife; but her house was very smoky. Muhammad soon moved the baby to a cleaner home among the Najjar clan. A flock of goats and some of the camels' milk were also reserved for feeding Ibrahim. The proud father was always checking up on his son. He was frequently propelled by an impulse to hurry off to the foster-mother's house, pull Ibrahim from a feeding, embrace him and then leave again.

Most people agreed that the child was robust and handsome. Only the jealous Aïsha declared that he was no different from any other baby. "Any child would grow strong if he drank that much milk!" It was very difficult for Muhammad's wives, for, as Aïsha said, "Children were denied to us."<sup>3</sup>

Muhammad's wives were all jealous of each other. Aïsha was still his favourite, and her nearest rivals were Zaynab and Umm Salama. Some said he was also fond of Hafsa, although Umar denied this. Muhammad was not particularly attached to Rayhana, Juwayriya or Safiya, despite their extreme beauty, or to Maymuna or Umm Habiba, despite their dedication to himself and to Islam. He even lost interest in Mariya, despite her special status as the mother of his only son. As for Saowda, who was very fat and had aged prematurely, Muhammad almost ignored her. He kept all his wives humble with constant reminders that none of them was as good as Khadija had been.

Muhammad taught that a Muslim husband should treat all his wives equally in matters that could be controlled, though "not the love of the heart." However, when he received a gift of luxury food, he usually shared it only with Aïsha. His other wives were left with bread, milk, dates—and resentment. He had set up a roster so that he slept with each wife in turn. The roster allocated two nights to Aïsha, none to Saowda and one to each of the others.

After Muhammad returned from a journey, the roster was always reset to start again with Aïsha.

Gabriel told Muhammad that Allah had granted him special permission, not available to any other Muslim, to break the roster and postpone one wife's turn if he felt the urge to sleep with another. He would ask the rostered wife's permission first, but Aïsha never dared say no. She only told him: "If I really could refuse permission, I would not allow you to favour another woman." In practice, Muhammad shared himself out among his wives however he liked whenever he liked.

The wives formed alliances among themselves. Aïsha's friends were Hafsa, Safiya and the motherly Saowda. Umm Salama led a clique of Zaynab, Umm Habiba, Maymuna, Juwayriya and Muhammad's daughter Fatima. Mariya and Rayhana did not live at the mosque complex; Muhammad, perhaps fearing unseemly public displays of cat-fighting or apostasy, kept them out of sight in the suburbs.<sup>4</sup>

Aïsha feigned friendliness to her new rivals, Mulayka and Fatima, until she found ways to turn their weaknesses against them. On discovering that Mulayka's father had been killed fighting Khalid's cavalry at the Conquest of Mecca, she asked, "Don't you find it shameful to have married the man who killed your father?"

Mulayka, who was said to be too young to know her mind, was old enough to feel the horror of her situation and to deal with it. The next time Muhammad came to her room, she pronounced the ancient divorce formula: "I seek refuge in Allah from thee!"

Muhammad granted the divorce. Mulayka died a few weeks later.<sup>5</sup>

A new year began on 23 April. Muhammad, now a King with subjects in many regions, celebrated by making the alms-tax compulsory. He sent out his tax-collectors to the ends of his domains. They collected 10% of the naturally irrigated crops, 5% of the bucket-watered crops and 2.5% of the camels, cows or

sheep. The alms-tax was not used by Muhammad personally but was only to relieve the poor and otherwise needy or to finance the Muslim army. Sometimes it was redistributed in the same tribe from which it had been taken.<sup>6</sup>

In Iraq a clan of the Tamim tribe misunderstood the situation. Thinking that the tax-collectors were stealing animals from their allies, they fought the tax-collectors.\* So Muhammad sent his new friend Pop-Eye to raid the Tamim; and the result was that they had to convert to Islam. Within a matter of weeks, three other northern tribes (the Baliy, Udhra and Jarm) sent ambassadors to Medina to declare their voluntary submission to Islam. Muhammad sent a military expedition northward to warn the remaining Syrian tribes.

He also attacked the Hun and Harith allies and two clans of the Kilab. However, most of his traditional enemies were now defeated and paying him tribute. Muhammad was ready to begin new campaigns further afield in the south.

He sent raiders, who returned with camels, goats and slaves. The tribe fled, and their neighbours took warning.<sup>7</sup> Several southern clans presented themselves at Medina uninvited to advise Muhammad of their conversion before he had a chance to fight them.

Seventy Jewish cavalrymen from the East Yemen branch of the “royal” tribe of Kinda rode into the mosque wearing striped robes, silk cloaks, eye-kohl and long, combed hair. Muhammad asked why Muslims would wear silk around their necks. Being too rich to care, the Kinda men tore off their cloaks and tossed them to the ground. As a reward for their submission, Muhammad gave 400 silver coins to each man.

Submitting alongside them were the neighbouring chiefs of West

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\* This skirmish is unique among Muhammad’s military adventures as the *only* occasion when he did not strike the first blow but was attacked by people with whom he had had no previous dealings.

Yemen and a black Arab from the Christian division of Kinda. This man persuaded Muhammad to seal their new alliance by marrying his daughter.

Princess Asma, a coal-black beauty, duly arrived in Medina. She was a Bedouin and a very new Muslim with no understanding of local customs. When Aïsha and Hafsa came to visit, they saw at once that the exotic newcomer would be an intimidating rival for the Prophet's love. Hiding their dismay, they flattered her on her royal appearance, combed her hair, painted on the bridal henna and gave advice for the wedding night.

"The Prophet loves prudish women," they claimed. "If you want to drive him wild with passion, remember to tell him, 'I seek refuge in Allah from thee!'"

When Muhammad entered the bedroom, the unsuspecting Asma said exactly what her rivals had advised. As soon as she spoke, Muhammad divorced her.<sup>8</sup>

Soon afterwards Aïsha complained that the other new bride, Fatima, was disobeying the rules of veiling. She had been peeping through her curtain at men in the mosque.

Muhammad confronted Fatima, reminding her of her duty to sit in her house and ignore men. She had a choice: would she choose the Prophet and Heaven, or did she prefer the world's wealth and a divorce?

Panic-struck, Fatima babbled that she had never consented to marrying Muhammad and she wanted a divorce. She recited the formula, "I seek refuge in Allah from thee," and Muhammad granted the divorce.<sup>9</sup>

At this point, Muhammad may have had words with Aïsha, for no Muslim woman ever used this divorce formula again.

In July he claimed that another neighbour of the Kinda, the Tayy, owed him taxes. When they denied it, he accused them of burning the contract. The Tayy chief knew then that Muhammad was

planning to attack them, so he kept camels ready for his escape. When Ali's cavalry swept down on the tribe, the chief fled to Syria; but the idol of the god Fuls was smashed, and a cavalcade of prisoners was herded back to Medina.

Muhammad invited the prisoners to convert to Islam. Those who did so were set free. Those who refused were beheaded.

Among the prisoners was the chief's sister. She waylaid Muhammad every time he passed, begging him: "O Allah's Messenger, have mercy on me, and Allah will have mercy on you! My father is dead; my son has been separated from me; my brother is far away; and I am too old to be useful to you."

At first Muhammad dismissed her pleas. "Your brother is running away from Allah!" In the end Ali gave her a camel and sent her to Syria, where she located her brother.

"I think you should follow Muhammad," she advised. "If he is a prophet, he will treat his earlier followers better than those who come later; and if he is only a King, it will be no disgrace for a man like you to associate with him."

She brought her brother back to Medina as a Muslim. So the great Tayy tribe fell under Muhammad's control.<sup>10</sup>

Sixty Christians from Najran, a town in Yemen, entered the mosque at afternoon prayers dressed in magnificent striped cloaks. Muhammad would not receive them because their costumes were too fine. The next day they reappeared dressed like monks. Muhammad invited them to embrace Islam. When they declined, a long discussion followed.\*

Muhammad argued that if they would only read their Torah, they would find that it foretold his coming and that they must follow him. He warned them they had rebelled against Allah by believing He had a son, worshipping the cross and eating pork.

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\* This was the first Christian-Muslim debate in history.

The Christians kept it polite. They said that the way God referred to Himself as “We” proved His plural nature. They confused Muhammad by talking about a Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit because Muhammad believed that the third person of their Trinity ought to be the Virgin Mary. They claimed that Jesus’ deity was proved by His miracles such as raising the dead and healing the sick. Muhammad did not deny these miracles, although he had also swallowed Gnostic tales that Jesus had spoken in His cradle and brought clay birds to life.

Since Muhammad believed in Jesus’ virgin birth, the Christians asked him who Jesus’ father had been if not God. On the spot, Muhammad could not think of an answer.

Later he rallied and produced a slew of new prophecies, stating that Allah Almighty could never have occupied so mundane a home as a human womb; that He had created Jesus out of dust in the same way as He had created Adam; and that worshipping a Trinity was a form of polytheism. This personalised prophecy gave them no more excuse for refusing Islam – Allah had spoken! Muhammad suggested that the Christians and Muslims should both together invoke Allah’s curses on the liars, and so they would see from the dreadful results whose faith was mistaken.

When the Christians refused to curse anyone, Muhammad agreed to make peace with Najran if the Christians would pay him an annual super-tax (*jizya*) of one gold coin per head. They were exempted from military service but they had to supply 30 camels, 30 horses, 30 spears and 30 mail-coats whenever he fought the polytheists in Yemen.<sup>11</sup>

For the Christians, Muhammad had exposed himself as a false prophet four years earlier. He had not merely denied that Jesus’ death was God’s salvation; he had actually denied that Jesus had ever died at all.

*And their saying: “Surely we have killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah;” and they did not kill him*

*nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so; and most surely those who differ therein are only in a doubt about it; they have no knowledge respecting it, but only follow a conjecture, and they killed him not for sure.*<sup>12</sup>

In October Muhammad heard a rumour that the Roman Emperor was assembling his army, including the Christian Arabs, at the Syrian border. He summoned his warriors from all the tribes of Arabia for a huge defensive effort.

The call was unpopular. The weather was scorching; the trek across the desert would be long and harsh; and the Muslims, who were fearless over surprise-attacks on weaker tribes, were terrified of defending themselves against the Roman legions. Man after man begged permission to remain behind without any excuse.

Muhammad bribed the reluctant warriors with promises of blonde Greek girls. He threatened to receive new verses of the Quraan that would name names. He warned them:

*And [they] said: "Do not go forth in the heat."  
Say: "The fire of Hell is much severe in heat."*<sup>13</sup>

He helped the prophecy with earthly fire. He heard that the rebels were meeting to discuss their resistance at a Jew's house, so he sent Talha to burn the house down on them. Talha set the building on fire, but the blaze did not spread fast enough to destroy the occupants. One man threw himself down from the burning roof and broke his leg; the others all escaped unharmed. The building was lost to the flames, so that was one Jewish house fewer in Medina.

Tribes outside Medina heeded Muhammad's call more dutifully, and he eventually gathered 30,000 men and 10,000 horses.

At the first halt on their march, Abdallah Aowf, the once-powerful Lion chief, pitched his camp separately. "Do you think," he asked his friends, "that fighting the Romans is like a war between Arabs? No, we'll be taken prisoner on the first day."



The hesitaters did not need to hear it twice. Abdallah brought them back to Medina that day. As the rest of the army pushed northward, one man after another dropped behind.

They marched into northern Arabia. At the town of Tabuk Muhammad learned that the rumours had been false. There was no Roman army on the Syrian border. The Emperor had no intention of attacking Arabia. There was no enemy in sight. Muhammad's largest army yet had trudged through the wilderness for no reason at all.<sup>14</sup>

Never one to waste a journey, Muhammad sent Khalid with 420 cavalry to attack Dumat al-Jandal. Although Muhammad had conquered the city three years earlier, and the Kalb tribe was paying him tribute, other tribes lived there too. A Christian clan of Kinda owned a fortress there, and Khalid's task was to take over the fortress.

The Kinda chief emerged from the fort on a moonlit night to hunt wild cows. Khalid's men ambushed the hunting party, killed the chief's brother (who was fighting back), stripped the chief of a silk brocade robe and promised not to kill him if he would let them into the fortress. The chief surrendered, and Khalid walked in. He took 800 slaves, 1,000 camels, 400 mail-coats and 400 spears together with the chief as plunder for Muhammad.

Muhammad spared the chief's life and let him go home in peace on condition that he converted to Islam and paid alms-tax to Medina.<sup>15</sup>

The surrender of Dumat al-Jandal, and the size of Muhammad's army, frightened the citizens of Tabuk. They asked him for a peace-treaty, and so did four of the surrounding villages. They agreed to accept a Muslim governor and to pay an annual super-tax. In return, they would be under Muslim protection (*dhimmia*): that is, Muslims would not attack their persons, steal their property or impose forced labour and would allow them to remain Christian or Jewish.

One village owed blood-money for various past crimes. For protection from their creditors, they contracted to pay Muhammad a super-super-tax of 25% of everything they fished, grew or span and 25% of their horses and mail-coats.

Without further fighting, Muhammad's great army returned to Medina.<sup>16</sup> Muhammad's daughter Umm Kulthum had just died, and Aunt Safiya was washing the corpse for burial. Muhammad was tearful at her funeral and said, "If I had ten more daughters, I would give them all to Uthman."

Since he had no more daughters, Uthman consolidated their alliance with the Ghatafan by marrying Pop-Eye's daughter. Before long he was a polygynist, for he also married girls from the Makhzum and Umayya clans—the old nobility of Mecca.<sup>17</sup>

Muhammad had no need to marry for politics. He took a fancy to Amra, a girl from the Kilab tribe. He proposed marriage, and her family was in no position to refuse him. When Amra undressed for the bridal night, Muhammad saw that she had the white patches of leprosy. He divorced her on the spot and sent her back to her family. She died a few months later.<sup>18</sup>

Muhammad could not afford to overlook the problem of Muslims who had disobeyed the call to *jihad* and refused to march to Syria. While he did not call the hypocrite Abdallah Aowf to account, he listened to the list of excuses from lesser men. Three warriors confessed that they had no excuse. Muhammad punished their honesty by forbidding everyone to speak to them; and every person in Medina obeyed this order. The Muslims shunned and excluded the three defectors until they felt invisible. One of them, Kaab Salima, described his excommunication.

People avoided us. Nobody spoke to me after prayers or at the bazaar. I would greet the Messenger after prayers, asking myself if his lips had moved in returning the greeting or not. I hated myself and the whole world as never before.

I climbed over my cousin's orchard-wall – for he was my best friend – but he did not return my greeting. I said, “You know I love Allah and His Messenger!” but he answered, “Allah and His Messenger know best.” When he had ignored me three times, my eyes swam with tears and I jumped back over the wall.

After forty days, the Messenger ordered me to separate from my wife, and I sent her back to her family. The world, spacious as it is, closed in on us and my soul was deep in distress.

Kaab felt it was a test of his faith; it never occurred to him to be angry with the community that was rejecting him.

On the fiftieth day, Muhammad proclaimed at dawn prayers that Allah had forgiven the three deserters. Kaab raced to the mosque, congratulated by Comrade neighbours whom he passed, to present himself to Muhammad with humble gratitude. He could not help noticing that, among the Immigrants, only Abu Bakr's cousin Talha spoke to him. He was nevertheless so happy to be accepted back into society that he offered to give away all he possessed in alms.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile Malik, the appointed Governor of the Hawazin, had been waging a guerrilla *jihad* on the farmlands around Ta'if. His gang stole all the animals discovered at pasture and started fights with any Thaqifite who crossed their path. Soon the people of Ta'if were too terrified to step beyond the city walls. The chiefs admitted: “Our herds are not safe; none of us can go out without being struck down.”

The Thaqif tribe were afraid that Muhammad would return to Ta'if. After nine months of Hawazin raiding, they were too weak to repel him a second time. Yet they saw Islam spreading all around them. That winter they sent a delegation to Medina to declare their surrender.

The delegation was afraid of Muhammad; they worried that he would poison their food while they were negotiating. Nor did they like his demands to obey the *sharia*. They pleaded that fornication was necessary, for they were single men far from home. Charging interest was necessary, for all their property was tainted with it. Alcohol was necessary, for Taïf was full of grapes. Prayer was demeaning. The Ramadan fast was too difficult. Worst of all, Muhammad required them to destroy the shrine of Al-Lat.

“Never! If the goddess finds out that we destroyed Her idol, She will kill our families!”

“Rubbish,” said Umar. “The goddess is a block of stone who doesn’t know whether you serve Her or not.”

Eventually they agreed to become Muslims. They begged for an extra three years before they had to smash Al-Lat, then two years, then one year, then one month, for they feared the people would riot. All that Muhammad would concede was that they need not wield the pick-axe themselves, for a famous Thaqif murderer, who had long ago defected to Islam, had volunteered to do the deed.<sup>20</sup>

Wahshi the javelinist had also realised there was no escape from Islam. When he was told that Muhammad never killed Muslims, he accompanied the Thaqif delegation to Medina and recited the declaration of faith along with them.

Muhammad recognised him. He said, “Sit. Tell me how you killed Uncle Hamza.” After listening to Wahshi’s story, he commanded, “Alas, never let me see your face again!”

Though officially reprieved because of his conversion, Wahshi always took care to remain out of Muhammad’s line of vision. After Muhammad’s death, he cared enough about Islam to join the army. In later life he turned to alcohol.<sup>21</sup>

Once Taïf had surrendered, there was a chain reaction all through Arabia. One tribe after another concluded that if Muhammad could subdue Mecca and Taïf, no other tribe had any chance of

withstanding him. If Islam was a religion of peace, the way to be at peace with Muhammad was to submit to his demands before he started fighting. A few needed the hint of a letter from Muhammad; but most simply followed their neighbours.

Over the next three or four months, over thirty delegations came to Medina from all over Arabia to tender their submission to Islam. Muhammad received the elders of the Asad, Bahila, Bakka, Bakr ibn Wa'il, Ghatafan, Hanifa, Hilal, Kaab, Kalb and Kilab; the northern tribes of Bahra, Hudhaym and Lakhm; the Yemenite tribes of Azd, Hamdan, Himyar, Jayshan, Murad and Tujib; and the Azd and Mahra of Oman. Clans of large tribes often arrived in separate delegations.

Few tribes came with the pure motive of seeking Allah. One small clan insisted on taking revenge on an enemy before they converted because they knew it would not be allowed afterwards. A Christian from Bahrain said his tribe would convert to Islam if Muhammad paid off his debt, to which Muhammad agreed. A chief from Yemen said that he had broken with his old allies because he was sick of losing wars and hoped for better luck under Muhammad. Muhammad assured him that if that was what he cared about, Islam would certainly be good for him. Another tribe confessed out loud that they were becoming Muslim because they did not feel safe otherwise.

Muhammad accepted all comers regardless of motive. He instructed one tribe to fight their polytheistic neighbours; and soon the neighbouring tribe, much the worse for the battle, arrived in Medina as Muslims.

Delegations were entertained in the homes of wealthy Muslims. After the delegates had testified that there was no god but Allah and Muhammad was His prophet, Muhammad gave each member of the delegation a cash present, typically of 400 silver coins. He wrote them a contract detailing their future relationship: basically, the Arabs could buy safety if they paid and prayed.

### **Muhammad's Treaty with the Conquered Tribes**

From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah.

Muhammad is lord over your tribe. You submit to Allah and testify to Islam. Therefore:

1. You will smash your idols (or demolish your church) and build a mosque.
2. You will not teach your old religion to your children.
3. You will pray at the five appointed times every day.
4. You will live by Allah's sharia.
5. You will pay the alms-tax of 10% of your harvest and 2.5% of your livestock every year.
6. You will fight in the jihad as required.
7. You will pay 20% of your war-booty to Muhammad.

If you do all this, you will be safe from Muhammad's army. Your person and property will not be attacked.<sup>22</sup>

Muhammad often appointed the existing chief as the Muslim governor; and often he made them a grant of their existing land. There were no mistakes about his requirements, for he sent them home with a tax-collector and a Quraan-teacher. As he admitted: "There is great disaster for one who disbelieves me and great prosperity for one who believes in me and fights for me."<sup>23</sup>

A few of these diplomatic visits progressed badly. Muhammad told one tribe that they looked like Indians and that if they had resisted the Muslim invasion the way they had resisted some of their other enemies he would have cut their heads off. He boasted to another tribe, "I treated your delegates kindly although I have the right to evict you from your land."

Two brothers from the Jufi tribe came to Medina and converted

to Islam. Since the Jufi had a taboo against eating heart, Muhammad made them prove their conversion by eating some. After the brothers had forced the food down, they asked about the eternal destiny of their mother, who had murdered their infant sister. Muhammad said that both the mother and the baby sister were now in Hell. The brothers were angry. They were not at all comforted when Muhammad pointed out that his own mother was also in Hell. They apostatised on the spot. On their way home they captured a Muslim tax-collector and stole his tax-camels. Muhammad cursed the Jufi; but there is no record that he punished them.

Amir, the one-eyed villain of the Mawuna Wells Ambush and now high chief of the Kilab, wanted to know what privileges Muhammad would grant him for converting. He was told he would receive the same privileges and duties as any other convert. He asked to be made governor of his own tribe; and Muhammad refused. He asked if he could keep the desert territory and leave the cities to Muhammad; and Muhammad refused. He conceded that Amir could keep control of his cavalry, and Amir threatened to bring the horses to fight Muhammad.

Although he spoke the words of conversion, his back-up plan was to assassinate Muhammad; but his accomplice lost his nerve.

Muhammad prayed to Allah to rid him of Amir Kilab, and Amir died of bubonic plague on the way home.

Muhammad ruled that polytheists must be fought until they converted or were killed; but he granted special concessions to Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians. Although he now hated the Jews, it was too late to retract his original claims about the special status of all monotheists; and he had no direct quarrel with the Christians or Zoroastrians. He therefore made a condition that if they obeyed his orders, did not fight him and paid him super-tax of one gold coin per head (in addition to the ordinary tax of 10% of their harvests), they could keep their religion, places of worship,

land, property and lives.

When the Taghlib tribe arrived from Iraq wearing golden crosses, he set them the additional condition that they must not baptise their children; and he did not pay them the usual gift.

The Muslims became accustomed to deputations. When a wolf entered the mosque, stood before the Prophet and howled, Muhammad joked, "This is a deputation from the beasts of prey! Shall we accept his allegiance and give him his rights and duties? Or shall we let him go and leave him to seize whatever he can?"

When the Muslims agreed not to make any alliance with the wolf, Muhammad pointed to the exit. On cue, the wolf turned around and ran out.<sup>24</sup>

The old Lion chief Abdallah Aowf died in February, and his family called Muhammad to recite the funeral prayers.

Umar was shocked. "Are you going to pray over Allah's enemy? You must remember when he ..." Umar made a long story of all Abdallah's sins.

Muhammad smiled and said, "I have a choice, Umar, to pray for him or not. It won't do any good, for Allah won't forgive him."

Muhammad said the prayers then walked with the bier and watched the burial. Soon afterwards, however, he pleased Umar with a new prophecy.

*And never offer prayer for any one of them who dies and do not stand by his grave; surely they disbelieve in Allah and His Messenger and they shall die in transgression.*<sup>25</sup>

Muhammad never again prayed over an unbeliever.<sup>26</sup> He no longer needed to grant any concessions to the polytheists, for they had become a minority.

Muhammad was King. He had Arabia. All the tribes were paying him tribute. All had to fight in his army. All had to live under *sharia* law. Those who prayed five times a day and listened to the reciting



of the Quraan learned not to question his dictates.

In mid-March 631 the month of pilgrimage began. Muhammad sent Abu Bakr to Mecca with 300 men to supervise the Great Pilgrimage rites at the Kaaba.

Abu Bakr organised the pilgrims around the Kaaba in the same way that it had always been done. Arabs from all over Arabia circled the Kaaba, ran between the two hills, threw pebbles at the pillar, slaughtered their sacrifices and shaved their heads.

On Slaughter Day Ali stood up to read a new prophecy that Muhammad had entrusted to him.

“Allah declares that He has cancelled Muhammad’s promise that polytheists might visit the Kaaba freely. After this year, polytheists are forbidden to make the pilgrimage. Allah grants them four more months to return home. Know that you cannot weaken Allah. He will bring disgrace and painful punishment to the infidel, and no unbeliever will go to Heaven.” If a Muslim found a polytheist in Mecca after 20 July:

*Then slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them captives and besiege them and lie in wait for them in every ambush.*<sup>27</sup>

The polytheists’ only escape was to repent, pray and pay, for Allah was beneficent and merciful.

Some of the Muslims expressed alarm over fighting so many polytheists for such a trivial reason. Ali’s brief from Muhammad had already answered their objections.

*What! will you not fight a people who broke their oaths and aimed at the expulsion of the Messenger, and they attacked you first; do you fear them? ... Fight them! Allah will punish them by your hands and bring them to disgrace, and assist you against them and heal the hearts of a believing people ... The idolaters are nothing but unclean, so they shall not approach the Sacred Mosque after this year.*<sup>28</sup>

“If they can’t even come into Mecca,” complained the citizens, “we’ll lose our markets, trade will be destroyed, and we’ll have to take a cut in our standard of living.”

Fortunately Allah had anticipated the loss of trade too: the Jews and Christians would pay. The Muslims would not only fight the polytheists but also the People of the Book. The only difference was that Jews and Christians had a third alternative to death or conversion. They could keep their faith and their lives if they paid the super-tax to the Islamic state.<sup>29</sup>

*If you fear poverty then Allah will enrich you out of His grace if He please; surely Allah is Knowing, Wise. Fight those who do not believe in Allah ... out of those who have been given the Book, until they pay the tax in acknowledgment of superiority and they are in a state of subjection.*<sup>30</sup>

### Summary

- Muhammad continued to fight various tribes at increasingly further distances from Medina. Some surrendered when he fought them; others surrendered without waiting to be fought.
- After several months of being raided by Muslims, Taïf surrendered to Islam.
- Tribes from all over Arabia sent deputations to declare their conversion to Islam. They had to destroy their idols, pray the Islamic prayers, pay taxes to Medina and fight in the army. However, Jews and Christians were allowed to keep their faith if they paid super-tax.
- Muhammad had control of all Arabia: he was “king” everywhere, and nearly everyone was a Muslim.
- Breaking his earlier promise, Muhammad declared Mecca to be a Muslim-only city. Any non-Muslim found there would be killed.

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*The Final Year***April 631 – June 632**

Muhammad's health was failing. His stomach-pains, which he blamed on the poison that he had swallowed three years earlier at Khaybar, were becoming more severe. His servant confirmed that the Prophet had a damaged uvula.

Muhammad was an expert on folk-medicine. He recommended sniffing at Indian incense to treat tonsillitis, drinking honey for diarrhoea, applying truffle-water to eye-diseases and chanting a healing-charm for ear-ache and scorpion-stings. He advised his congregation to kill dogs, white-striped snakes and short-tailed snakes immediately, for their presence caused blindness and miscarriages; and powdered antimony was the best eye-ointment, for it also made the hair sprout.

When it came to poison, Muhammad claimed that eating seven sweet-dates for breakfast would ward off poison and magic for the whole day; but it was too late, for evidently he had not eaten seven sweet-dates on that day at Khaybar. Instead, he had himself cauterised and he had blood let from his forehead, left arm and the back of his neck. None of it relieved his pain.<sup>1</sup>

He was not too sick to take a new concubine. Tukana had been a household slave for several years, for she was a member of the Qurayza tribe who had been captured along with the rest and allocated to Muhammad's personal share. She was too beautiful for comfort, so Muhammad's wives had kept her hidden away from him. They must have become careless, for Muhammad eventually saw Tukana; and just as his wives had feared, he ordered her into his bed.<sup>2</sup>

He sent his tax-collectors to every district of Arabia under his control. There were still a few stubborn areas of Yemen that

remained independent; they were his final project.

He was never again present on a battle-field in person. He sent his commander Khalid to deal with the polytheists in the Najran area. "Call them to Islam for three days," he instructed, "and do not use violence. If they haven't converted at the end of three days, fight them."

Khalid dispersed his sword-wielding missionaries in all directions, promising, "If you accept Islam, you will not be attacked." He was soon able to report to Muhammad: "They have surrendered without any fighting. I am staying among them instructing them in the *halal* and the *haram* and teaching them about Islam."

A new convert volunteered to smash the temple of the god Khalasa on the Yemenite border. The local tribes defended their white quartz god desperately and fought off the destroyers until 300 of their warriors had been killed. Eventually the priests of the shrine were slain and the temple was set on fire and burned to ashes.

Later Muhammad sent Ali with 300 cavalry to join Khalid in Maddhij territory. Despite Muhammad's strict instructions not to fight them until they refused Islam, "not even if they fight you first," Ali sent the horsemen on a pillaging trip. Only after rounding up the capture of people, animals and property did Ali invite the Maddhij tribe to Islam. The Maddhij refused the invitation and started a fight. Ali fought them back until twenty men were killed and the rest scattered in defeat. Soon a group of their chiefs approached Ali declaring the whole tribe's conversion to Islam and offering an advance payment of their first alms-tax.

Other tribes of Yemen presented themselves at Medina without resisting the Muslims. There were not as many deputations as in the previous year, only the last few dissenters. Muhammad received deputations from the tribes Bajila, Ghamid, Harith, Khaowlan, Khathaam, Muharib, Ruhawiyin, Salaman, Sudaa, the mixed tribes of Jurash city and, last of all, the Nakhaa.

Polytheists prayed and paid; Jews and Christians paid super-tax. Muhammad's tax-collectors and Quraan-teachers took over Yemen. At first he let them keep one of their own chiefs as Governor; but when this man died, he divided Yemen among his own friends. They included Khadija's son Hind over Tihama, Umm Salama's brother over Sanaa and Abu Sufyan over Jurash.

Arabia was said to be "laden with faith," and every tribe was officially Muslim.<sup>3</sup>

That faith was a cult based around Muhammad's personality. His disciples in Medina did not look at him directly or speak in his presence. When he washed, his friends ran to touch the water he had used. If his spittle landed on a man's hand, he did not wash it off but rubbed it on his skin, and other men swarmed to him to touch it. Muhammad only had to hint at his wish, and someone was sure to do it. One Thaqif chief remarked, "I have never seen a King who was obeyed like Muhammad!"<sup>4</sup>

Muhammad found this appropriate. He was, after all, a great King in Allah's sight. Since he spoke Allah's words, he was supposed to know the answers to all kinds of scientific questions.

When he was asked why some children looked like their fathers and others like their mothers, he asserted: "The angel Gabriel has just this minute explained it to me. If the man's discharge comes first, the child will look like his father. If the woman's discharge comes first, then the child will look like his mother."

He also knew where the sun went at night. It travelled to the far west of the world until it sank into a muddy pond and installed itself under Allah's throne. Each morning Allah gave it permission to rise again. "One day," he predicted, "Allah won't grant permission but will order the sun to return to where it came from. That morning it will rise in the west."

He was confident about hygiene. He drew his water from a well into which dead dogs, used menstrual cloths and chamber-pots

were thrown. When he was queried about the dirt, he replied, "Water is pure and is not defiled by anything." When a fly fell into a household vessel, his advice was: "Dip the whole fly right in and then throw it away, for in one of its wings is disease and in the other is an antidote."

Several of his wise words were untestable. A Bedouin asked the vital question: "I love horses. Are there horses in Heaven?"

Muhammad, who also loved horses, promised him: "If you go to Heaven, you will be given a winged horse made of rubies, and it will carry you wherever you want to go."

He said that cocks crowed because they had seen an angel and donkeys brayed if they saw a devil. He said that the Devil spent the night inside a person's nose, so it was necessary to clean one's nose three times on awakening. He said that good dreams came from Allah but bad dreams were from Satan. To ward off the harmful effects of a nightmare, a Muslim should spit three times to his left and seek refuge in Allah. However, one kind of dream need never worry anyone: "Whoever dreams about me has truly seen me, for Satan cannot appear in my form."<sup>5</sup>

He encouraged clarification questions. He commended Aisha for asking a lot of them. In his determination that Allah's will should be perfectly understood, he tolerated them with an almost humorous level of patience.

Once, after reminding the Muslims to give charity to the poor, he was asked, "What about a person who doesn't have anything?"

"He should work with his hands, look after himself and then give charity."

"What if he is disabled or can't find work?"

"Then he should give practical help to someone who needs it."

"What if he can't find anyone who needs help?"

"Then he should tell other people to do good works."



“What if he doesn’t have the chance to do that?”

“He should avoid committing a sin. That is charity for him.”

However, he did not tolerate any kind of dissent or criticism among his subjects. He disliked the type of question that expressed scepticism. He warned: “People in past times were only destroyed by their excessive questioning and disagreeing with their prophets.”

Even small disobediences irritated him. He went into Fatima and Ali’s house in the dead of night to rouse them for night prayers. Ali, still half asleep, murmured, “Allah will wake us for them if it’s His will.” Although the night prayers were optional, Muhammad accused Ali of being quarrelsome. As he left he was quoting, “*Man is most of all given to contention!*”<sup>6</sup>

As we have seen, Muslims who displeased their Prophet in more significant matters could expect to be shunned by the whole community. For those who abandoned Islam altogether, there was no forgiveness. Once a former Muslim declared that he no longer believed in Allah or the Messenger, there was no need to bring the case to the law-court or even to call witnesses. He was an apostate and he must be killed.

Two of Muhammad’s governors in Yemen, Muadh and Abu Musa, reported back on this grave matter. Muadh visited Abu Musa, who put out a cushion and invited him to sit down.

Instead of sitting, Muadh looked at a man who was bound hand and foot next to Abu Musa and asked, “What is this?”

“He is a Jew who converted to Islam. Then he reverted to the evil religion of Judaism.”

“I’ll chop off his head!” exclaimed Muadh. “I won’t sit down until he is killed according to Allah’s judgment.”

“Yes, yes, sit down. It will be done.”

“No, I won’t sit until that man is killed!”

When he said it for the third time, still standing, Abu Musa gave the order, and the Jew was killed on the spot.

With the Jew's blood still soaking into the earth beneath Abu Musa's tent, the two governors then sat down for a cosy chat about optional night prayers. Muadh usually kept the vigil and he hoped Allah would reward him as much for his sleep as for his prayers.<sup>7</sup>

One certain sign of apostasy, of course, was to claim that Allah's Messenger might do wrong. This was a capital crime for Muslim and non-Muslim alike.

When a dead woman was found stabbed through the stomach, Muhammad appealed to the congregation: "I adjure the man who has done this to stand up."

A trembling blind man arose and confessed. "Allah's Messenger, she was my slave." The *sharia* did not allow a master to kill his slave without good reason, so the man explained himself further. "Though she bore me two sons and she was my companion, she used to insult and sneer at you. I told her to stop and I rebuked her, but she kept on doing it. Last night she slandered you again. So I stabbed her stomach with my dagger."

Although there were no other witnesses to the concubine's crime, Muhammad decreed: "There is no punishment for her blood."<sup>8</sup>

As Muhammad reminded his friends, "I have been commissioned to perfect the virtues." His life was the example for everyone to follow.<sup>9</sup>

*Certainly you have in the Messenger of Allah an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in Allah.*<sup>10</sup>

In case his example was in doubt, he made rules for everything. Houses should not be built several storeys tall nor painted bright colours. Angels did not enter a house that contained pictures, so Muhammad made his wives cut the heads off human-shaped sculptures and tear down curtains with animal patterns. A householder ought not to keep gold or silver cups.<sup>11</sup>

People should not lean against anything while eating. Food and drink must not be held in the left hand, for that was what Satan did, and food should be passed around the table to the right. It was bad manners to eat two dates in one mouthful. Garlic and onion were not forbidden, but a person who ate them should keep away from the mosque as long as the smell lasted.<sup>12</sup>

Hair should only be combed on alternate days. A moustache should be shaved but a beard should be left to grow. Wigs and black hair-dye were forbidden, though red, brown and yellow dyes were encouraged. Gold jewellery and silk were forbidden to men, but they were allowed silver in moderation; and women could wear moderate quantities of all of them. Men were encouraged to wear perfume, but women should only wear odourless ointments in public. White was the best colour for men to wear; but Muhammad's wives never wore white. Women were forbidden to tattoo. Nobody should wear leopard-hides, and saddles should not be made of leopard-hides, silk or purple.<sup>13</sup>

Laughter should be restrained, for "much laughter kills the heart." Allah loved sneezing; a Muslim who said, "Praise Allah!" whenever he heard a sneeze would never suffer toothache or earache. Yawning came from Satan: if a yawn were not covered by a hand, Satan might enter the yawner's mouth. Sleeping face-down on one's stomach came from Hell.<sup>14</sup>

Music was restricted. Certain musical instruments, such as bells, trumpets\* and flutes, were satanic; others, such as drums, were allowed.† Professional singers were in general banned (Abu Bakr called them "Satan's flutes"), but there was a special exception to allow them at weddings. Private singing was allowed if the songs were suitable. Muhammad permitted battle-songs, laments, rejoicings, a song of admiration to himself and camel-drivers

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\* This was possibly because bells were associated with churches and trumpets with synagogues.

† The status of stringed instruments was left ambiguous.

crooning to their camels.<sup>15</sup>

Muslims should be careful of their names. Allah's favourite names were Abdallah and Abdalrahman. He also endorsed Bashir, Fatima, Harith, Hisham, Ibrahim, Jamila, Mundhir, Saad, Yusuf, Zaynab and of course Muhammad. If a Muslim bore an unsuitable name, Muhammad changed it. He particularly disliked Barra ("pious") because it sounded as if the woman were boasting of her piety. He objected to Abu'l-Hakam ("judge") because only Allah was the Judge.\* He also changed the names of people called Asiya ("rebellious"), Ghurab ("crow"), Harb ("war"), Munbaith ("liar"), Murra ("bitter") and Abu'l-Qasim (because it was his own name). He thought of forbidding Afla ("successful"), Baraka ("blessing"), Nafi ("helper"), Yaala ("elevated") and Yasir ("wealth") but he died before he could compose a formal prophecy about it. However, these names were not to be used for servants. It would be unlucky if someone asked, "Is Baraka in the house?" and the answer happened to be "No."<sup>16</sup>

Muhammad forbade most forms of betting, but he made an exception for horse- and camel-racing and archery contests. His camel Slit-Ear was a safe bet, for she had never been beaten in a race. One day a Bedouin entered Medina on a young camel and joined the races. The Bedouin won. The Muslims hardly dared to tell Muhammad that Slit-Ear had been beaten. Fortunately he took the news philosophically: "Everything that is lifted high in this world, Allah will bring down again."<sup>17</sup>

He had not completed his task just because he had united Arabia. Since Allah had created the whole world, He required the whole world to submit to Him. Muhammad made no secret of his commission. "I have been raised," he said, "for the rise of one nation and the downfall of another. Allah has sent me as a gift of mercy to all the world." For that reason, "I have been commanded

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\* *Abu'l-Hakam*, which might also be translated "Mr Clever", had been the other nickname of Muhammad's enemy Mr Stupid.

to fight against people until they testify that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger."

By winter he was ready to return to *jihad*, this time against the Christians in Syria. He was not embarrassed to solicit donations, for the stated purpose of the alms-tax was not only to relieve the poor and other needy but to free slaves, underwrite debts, assist travellers, bribe new converts and finance *jihad*. He ended his *Eid al-Fitr* sermon with a special address to the women.

"Ladies, give alms!" he said. "Pray a great deal for forgiveness, for most of you are on your way to Hell."

Inevitably, a woman asked, "Why? How did we sin?"

"You're always grumbling. Women lead wise people astray as men never do, for women are far less intelligent and virtuous." As evidence for their faults he reminded them: "A woman's legal evidence is worth only half of a man's. That's because women are less intelligent. And a woman can't pray or fast while she is menstruating. That makes her less virtuous."

Stirred by this threat of Hellfire, the women began to build up good works by stripping off their necklaces and earrings and throwing them into the collection pile on Bilal's cloak.<sup>18</sup>

Muhammad never made a clear, direct statement about who should rule his kingdom after his death. Saad Saïda intended to make himself high chief of Medina but he had no real ambition to take over the rest of Arabia. Ali, supported by Uncle Abbas, assumed that he and his sons had a hereditary right in the situation. Aïsha, who knew the Prophet best, always insisted that he intended her father Abu Bakr to become his immediate successor, most likely to be followed by Umar. Abu Sufyan and his son Muaawiyah hoped to take control back into the Umayya clan but they were willing to bide their time.<sup>19</sup>

Muhammad's son Ibrahim was too young to be a candidate. In fact he did not live long enough to create complications for the adult

rivals. He became sick that winter and died on 30 January. Muhammad told Mariya to stop crying, for wailing at funerals was forbidden. Yet his own eyes leaked as the baby was buried.

Afterwards he preached a gloomy sermon about the troubles of life and the evils of adultery. "I looked into Heaven," he said, "and I saw that most of its people were the poor. I looked into Hell, and I saw that most of its people were women. They had been ungrateful to their husbands. A man can provide for a woman for a lifetime, yet if he beats her just once, she says, 'You've never done me any good.'"<sup>20</sup>

Muhammad, who had chosen to disinherit Zayd, was once again left without a son. He was nevertheless fond of Zayd's son Usama. He sought his advice, entrusted him with military responsibility, arranged prestigious marriages for him, gave him gifts and took him everywhere.

He also had a normal relationship with his two grandsons, Hassan and Hussayn, whom he called "my two sweet basils in this world". He carried them on his hips. He sat them in front and behind him when he rode around town on Quickstep. He carried one of the boys into prayers, bowed down with the child still on his back and lengthened the prostration for the child's amusement. Once he left the bazaar asking, "Where is the little one? Call Hassan!" Hassan came running into his arms. Another time Hussayn ran away from his grandfather in the street, laughing, until Muhammad caught and kissed him. They would climb into the pulpit while he preached. When they came tripping over their long red robes, Muhammad stopped preaching to pick them up and he sat them in his lap while he finished the sermon.

Strangely, there are no such tender stories about Fatima's two daughters. Although they were no longer babies, Muhammad never paid them the kind of attention that he showered on the two boys. Perhaps it was because they were mere girls; yet Muhammad had shown plenty of affection to their cousin Umama, so the

absence of stories about little Zaynab and Umm Kulthum is somewhat surprising.

He did not tolerate un-Islamic behaviour even from the two sweet basils. He let them play with the dates in the alms-pile, but when Hassan started to eat one, Muhammad forced it out of his mouth. When he saw them wearing expensive silver bracelets, he refused to enter the house until Fatima had cut off the bracelets and given them away to the poor. The boys wept, and Muhammad said it would be all right for them to wear ivory.

Another day he threw their pet puppy out of the house, “for angels do not visit houses where there are dogs.” The next morning he ordered every dog in Medina to be killed. The Muslims systematically slaughtered as many as they found. When dead dogs littered all the streets, some farmers pleaded for mercy for their worker-dogs. Muhammad reconsidered. He conceded that red and yellow dogs could be allowed for farm work. However, black dogs came from Satan and must never be left alive; and for a Muslim who kept a dog as a mere pet, Allah would cancel the reward-credit for one good deed per day.<sup>21</sup>

As the pilgrimage season approached, Muhammad decided that he would perform the Great Pilgrimage at the Kaaba in Mecca. He had not made the pilgrimage since he had declared himself a prophet, and he did not expect to live another year. He took his whole family, and Muslims from all over Arabia met him in Medina or joined him on the journey. It was to be the first Muslim-only Great Pilgrimage and the greatest community festival since Islam began.

Dressed in a white sheet with his right shoulder exposed, he entered Mecca riding on Slit-Ear. He demonstrated to the crowd exactly how to perform a correct pilgrimage: the locations for beginning and ending, where to stand, how to run between the two hills, how to slaughter the animals, how to throw the pebbles at the pillar of Mina, how to circle the Kaaba. On Mount Arafah he stood

### **Muhammad's Farewell Sermon**

O people, hear and remember my words, for I do not know if I shall ever meet you here again.

Your lives and possessions are sacred and inviolable until the day you meet Allah, when He will ask you about your actions. There are three things that you must never betray: good deeds; the advice of your leaders; and love for the Muslim community.

All Muslims are brothers, so do not steal from one another. Repay your loans, but charging interest is forbidden. The first interest that I cancel is whatever you owe to my Uncle Abbas.

If your relative was killed before Islam, do not claim blood-money. The first claim that I cancel is my cousin Rabia's claim for the killing of his son Iyas.

There is no danger that Satan will be openly worshipped in this land, but he will tempt you to obey him in matters that seem small to you. So beware of Satan!

Intercalary months are for infidel. They hide the real date so people do not know when the holy days are. Today's date is correct. We recognise only twelve months in a year.

Fear Allah regarding women, for your right to possess them and have sex with them is from Allah's Word. It is your right that your wives be faithful to you and behave modestly. If they do not, Allah allows you to put them in separate rooms and to beat them, but not severely. If they behave well, they have the right to food and clothes. Treat women kindly, for they are like domestic animals with you and do not possess their own persons.

Hear my words, O people! I have left with you the Book of Allah and the example of His prophet. If you hold fast to them, they will never lead you astray.<sup>22</sup>



and preached his conclusive sermon. He finished by asking the crowds, "If Allah asks you on the Day of Resurrection whether I have informed you properly, what will you say?"

"Yes!" they responded. "You have taught, acted and advised!"

"O Allah, bear witness!"

Afterwards he went with his cousins to drink the holy Zamzam water. He had not prophesied much since the conquest of Mecca, but he now produced a new chapter of the Quraan.

*When there comes the help of Allah and the victory,  
and you see men entering the religion of Allah in companies,  
then celebrate the praise of your Lord,  
and ask His forgiveness; surely He is oft-returning.*<sup>23</sup>

"This is a sign," he said, "of Allah's call and departure from the world." Apart from a few short additions to old chapters, this was the last prophecy that Muhammad composed.

Before his final departure from Mecca, his cousin Fakhita, his first love, approached him. Her husband Hubayra had died in Najran. Fakhita, who was now plump and ailing, told Muhammad that her children had grown up and she was finally ready to marry him.

"No," he replied. "You are too late."<sup>24</sup>

As soon as he arrived home in Medina, Muhammad fell ill. There were several anxious days, but he seemed to recover. It was his concubine Rayhana who died and was quietly buried in the family cemetery next to the mosque. His camel Slit-Ear also died at this time.<sup>25</sup>

Musaylima, a chief from South Arabia, heard of Muhammad's illness and seized the moment to declare himself the successor-prophet. He produced prophecies like this one.

*O shrenmouse, O shrenmouse!  
You are only two ears and a chest,  
and the rest of you is digging and burrowing.*

He sent this message to Medina.

From Musaylima, Allah's Messenger, to Muhammad, Allah's Messenger: peace be upon you. I have been made partner with you in authority. Half the land belongs to us and half to the Quraysh, but the Quraysh are not respecting this boundary.

Muhammad asked the messengers, "What do you think of this?"

"We think the same as Musaylima."

"If it were not for the rule that messengers must not be killed," he said, "I would behead the pair of you!" He dictated a reply back to the rival prophet.

From Muhammad, Allah's Messenger, to Musaylima the Liar: peace be upon the followers of the truth. The earth belongs to Allah, and He decides who will inherit it. The reward is for those who fear Allah.<sup>26</sup>

For two months, life continued as usual. Muhammad strengthened his alliance with the high chief of the Kinda by offering to marry the chief's sister Qutayla. The contract was finalised, and the princess packed for her wedding. However, Muhammad never met her in person, for she did not complete the long journey from East Yemen to Medina in his lifetime.

Muhammad felt well enough to begin expanding his borders. On 28 April he launched his final military expedition, designed to bring some of Syria under his control. There was no threat from Syria; Muhammad was invading it to avenge his defeat at Muta three years earlier. It was the first step to conquering the whole world.

He gave the commander's flag to his ex-grandson Usama and instructed him: "Go to the place where your father was killed. March quickly, so that you arrive ahead of the news. Attack early in the morning, set fire to it and trample the people under your horses. Fight in Allah's pathway and kill whoever disobeys Allah. Heaven is under the flash of your sword."

The next day Muhammad suffered from another headache and fever; but again, he recovered.

The family's cash-flow problems continued. Muhammad invested his money in his army or gave it away to the poor as soon as he had any, so there was no food in his household. He sent his servant to pawn his shield, and the servant brought home about 65 kg of barley and some rancid oil. As it happened, Muhammad did not live long enough to redeem his shield.

His wife Zaynab made him a present of a pretty slave-girl, Nafisa, who for a few days became his final concubine.<sup>27</sup>

On 29 May Muhammad was suffering from another headache. He went on his usual afternoon round of greeting each of his wives. In Maymuna's house he nearly collapsed.

Having lost track of his wife-roster, he asked, "In whose house shall I be tomorrow? And in whose the day after?"

Maymuna realised that he wanted to be with Aïsha. She called to Ali and to Uncle Abbas's son, who supported Muhammad, his feet dragging, across the courtyard to Aïsha's door. Fatima told the other wives that he was too ill to be moved again, and they all agreed to donate their turns with Muhammad to Aïsha for as long as he was ill.

For thirteen days, Aïsha nursed him, while he ran a high fever and his pain steadily worsened. Aïsha said that nobody ever suffered as much agony as Muhammad in his final illness. He insisted that the pain was caused by the poisoned mutton that he had tasted at Khaybar, "and now I feel as if it's cutting my aorta."

He begged for a cold bath, so his wives sat him in Hafsa's tub and poured water over him until he beseeched them to stop. At nights he tossed and turned in bed, moaning and groaning, until Aïsha scolded, "You would never have tolerated this behaviour from any of your wives!"

Sometimes he was able to preach and lead prayers in the mosque

from a sitting position. When he became too feverish to leave his bed, he said that Abu Bakr must lead the prayers. Abu Bakr wept so much that he could not pronounce the words, and the congregation wept with him. Once Umar took over the prayers instead, and Muhammad was furious; he said that Allah had forbidden anyone but Abu Bakr to superintend. Abu Bakr led the prayers seventeen times during Muhammad's illness.

On the ninth day of his illness Muhammad directed, "Bring an ink-pot and tablet. I'll put my instructions in writing, so that there won't be any mistake."

He seemed delirious, and friends disputed whether he understood his own words. His wife Zaynab argued that they must always obey the Prophet. Umar was opposed to recording possible nonsense in writing. Ali, fearing that Muhammad would die before there was time to fetch the ink, offered to memorise the instruction instead. Zaynab shouted at Umar, who yelled back, until they were both making so much noise that Muhammad called for everyone to leave.

He did not ask for ink again but he became lucid enough to continue with his instructions. "Prayers!" he kept repeating. "And slaves! Fear Allah in how you treat your slaves. Give them clothes; give them food; speak kindly to them." He declared that he had freed all the slaves in his household, including his three concubines.

"Expel the polytheists from Arabia," he continued. "Don't convert my grave into a shrine; Allah's curse is on the Jews and Christians for doing that. There must be only one religion in the land of Arabia. I will expel the Jews and Christians and leave only Muslims."

That was his final general instruction; yet its specifics were at risk of being disobeyed. He was in the process of invading Syria, a Christian territory; and seasoned warriors were grumbling as they packed their equipment that Usama was too young to lead them.

On the eleventh day Muhammad heard about it. He was so enraged that he dragged himself out to the pulpit with his head bandaged and a sheet draped over him. "You criticised Usama's father Zayd in the same way," he rebuked his rebellious troops, "but Zayd was a competent commander, and Usama is competent too. Usama's army must proceed!"

This effort exhausted him, and his illness became even worse. His stomach was still in agony. On the twelfth day Abu Bakr's wife mixed a medication of agarwood and turmeric, which Umm Salama and Maymuna forced into Muhammad's mouth while he was half-conscious. He struggled against them, denying that he had that sort of illness, and ordered every woman in the house to drink a dose in punishment. Then he once again lapsed into unconsciousness.

At dawn the next day he staggered out of bed and stood at Aisha's doorway to watch the prayers. When the people saw him, they rejoiced to see him so much better and were distracted from their prostrations. Muhammad, supported by two men, toiled across to Abu Bakr and sat at his side while Abu Bakr continued to lead the prayers.

After prayers he went indoors, where Aisha combed his hair and made him comfortable. He settled to lie with his head in her lap. Usama returned from his base-camp for final instructions, and Muhammad told him, "March out tomorrow morning with Allah's blessing." Everyone assumed he was recovering from his illness.<sup>28</sup>

They were wrong. He was restless and could not sleep. He fretted about some gold coins that he had entrusted to Aisha and insisted that she give them to Ali to be distributed among the poor. After she did so, he calmed down and dozed off.

When he next woke, he asked for a tooth-stick. Aisha chewed one for him to soften it, and he brushed vigorously, so that, as she said, his saliva was combined with hers in his last hours.

She took his hand and chanted a healing-charm; but he loosened his hand from hers and his eyes became fixed. “No,” he said, “I want to be with the people of Heaven. O Allah, forgive my sins and let me enter the Eternal Garden.” Those were his last words.

Baraka dispatched an emergency message to her son Usama. He and Umar dashed back to the mosque and entered the house just in time to say goodbye, although it was not clear whether Muhammad was aware of them.

His head grew heavy in Aïsha’s lap, until she realised he had died. It was the afternoon of 10 June 632. He was 61 years old.<sup>29</sup>

Abu Bakr walked in a few minutes too late. He kissed the corpse, then went out to the courtyard, where Umar was babbling that Muhammad could not really be dead. Abu Bakr remained calm until the crowd gathered around him. Then he proclaimed the news.

“O people, if anyone worships Muhammad, Muhammad is dead; but if anyone worships Allah, Allah is alive forever!”<sup>30</sup>

### **Summary**

- Muhammad expected to die because of his constant pain, which he attributed to the poison that he had ingested at Khaybar.
- He continued to bring Yemen under his control; he collected taxes from and sent teachers to the whole of Arabia; and he made plans to invade Syria.
- He made a final pilgrimage to Mecca, where he preached a Farewell Sermon and declared that he had completed his prophetic task.
- He died of a fever on 10 June 632 at the age of 61.

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### **References and Notes to Chapter 16: *The Final Year***

1 Malik 8:7:22, 23. Waqidi (Faizer) 334. Bukhari 3:47:786; 4:54:518, 527; 6:60:5; 7:65:356; 7:71:588, 599, 609, 611, 614, 617, 671. Muslim 26:5430, 5442, 5443, 5545. Abu Dawud

40:4493, 4495, 4498.

2 Ibn Kathir (Le Gassick) 4:435. Majlisi (Rizvi) 2:1180.

3 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 643-649, 660, 678-679. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 702 #73, 712 #916. Ibn al-Kalbi (Faris) 29-31. Waqidi (Faizer) 528-530. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:353-354, 382, 384-385, 391, 399-400, 404-409; 2:209-210. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:91, 106-107, 109. Tabari (Poonawala) 9:82-85, 87-90, 92-94, 105, 123; (Donner) 10:18-20. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q110:1-3.

4 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 503. Waqidi (Faizer) 294.

5 Q18:83-86. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 139. Ibn Hanbal (Khattab) 3 #3559. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:469. Bukhari 4:54:421, 522, 537; 4:55:546; 5:58:275; 6:60:71; 7:71:643, 673; 9:87:133. Muslim 2:462. Abu Dawud 1:67. Tirmidhi 4:12:2544. *See also*: Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 12. If the poem is genuine, Muhammad was not the first person to believe that the sun set there.

6 Q18:54. Ibn Hanbal (Khattab) 1 #571. Bukhari 1:3:103; 2:21:227; 6:60:248. Bukhari, *Mufrad* 11:225. Tirmidhi 5:39:2679.

7 Bukhari 5:59:632; 9:83:17, 37; 9:84:58, 64. Muslim 20:4490. Abu Dawud 39:4340. Nasai 5:37:4062, 4065, 4066, 4067, 4068. Tirmidhi 4:7:2158. Ibn Maja 3:20:2533.

8 Abu Dawud 39:4348; 40:4501. Tirmidhi 3:14:1414. *See also* Abu Dawud 39:4349. It is not clear whether this is a separate incident or an alternative telling of the same.

9 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 503. Waqidi (Faizer) 294. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:222.

10 Q33:21 (Shakir).

11 Malik 49:7:11. Bukhari 4:54:447; 7:69:538; 7:72:728, 833, 834, 835, 836, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845. Bukhari, *Mufrad* 25:8, 459. Muslim 24:5126, 5128. Tirmidhi 5:41:2806.

12 Bukhari 1:12:814; 3:40:542; 7:65:310, 357. Bukhari, *Mufrad* 48:1189.

13 Ibn Hanbal (Cairo) 6 #26681. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:301. Bukhari 6:60:409; 7:71:636; 7:72:718, 719, 720, 721, 724, 725, 725, 728, 731, 732, 753, 754, 755, 756, 759, 786, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 829, 831, 832, 845. Muslim 2:495. Abu Dawud 1:320; 32:4037, 4038, 4040, 4050, 4117, 4119, 4120; 34:4223; 35:4224. Nasai 6:48:5048, 5049, 5057, 5058, 5059, 5060, 5061, 5072, 5073, 5074, 5075, 5076, 5077, 5078, 5079, 5080, 5081, 5082, 5083, 5084, 5085, 5086, 5087, 5088, 5091, 5096, 5098, 5099, 5100, 5101, 5102, 5104, 5147, 5148, 5149, 5150, 5151.

14 Bukhari, *Mufrad* 12:253; 40:919, 926, 949; 48:1188.

15 Bukhari 2:15:72; 5:59:336; 7:69:494. Muslim 4:1938; 24:5279; 30:5743. Abu Dawud 14:2550. Nasai 3:9:1899; 4:26:3371, 3385; 5:38:4140. Tirmidhi 1:46:3690. Ibn Maja 3:9:1900; 3:16:2445.

16 Bukhari 4:53:345; 8:73:207, 211, 212. Bukhari, *Mufrad* 19:367; 33:775; 34:811, 814, 815, 816, 820, 821, 822, 824, 825, 826, 829, 831, 832, 833, 834, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841. Muslim 25:5327, 5328, 5329, 5331, 5334, 5337. Abu Dawud 20:3224; 42:4935, 4936, 4938, 4940. Tirmidhi 5:41:2838, 2839.

17 Bukhari 4:52:124. Abu Dawud 14:2568. Nasai 4:28:3618. Tirmidhi 3:21:1700. Tabari 9:150-151.

18 Q9:60; 21:107. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:222. Bukhari 1:6:301; 1:8:387; 2:24:541. Muslim 1: 30, 31, 32, 33, 142; 4:1926. Nasai 2:19:1576. Ibn Maja 5:36:4003.

19 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 681-687. Bukhari 7:70:570. Suyuti (Jarrett) 197. Tabari (Humphreys) 15:121-125, 145-147, 157.

20 Malik 12:2. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:155-164; (Bewley) 8:150-151. Bukhari 1:2:29; 1:6:301; 2:18:153, 154, 161; 2:24:541; 7:62:124, 125, 126; 8:76:456, 554, 555. Muslim 1:142; 4:1926, 1976; 36:6596, 6597. Abu Dawud 20:3120. Nasāi 2:16:1494; 2:19:1576. Tirmidhi 2:2:635; 4:13:2602, 2603 ; 5:38:2613. Tabari (Landau-Tasserón) 39:194-195.

21 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 279, 496, 522-523, 652, 678-679. Malik 29:67; 54:5:14. Waqidi (Faizer) 547, 550. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:192. Bukhari 4:52:306. Muslim 5:2339. Abu Dawud 3:1104; 34:4201, 4223. Nasāi 2:12:1142; 2:14:1414; 19:1586. Tirmidhi 1:46:3774, 3769; 5:41:2775. Ibn Maja 1:1:144; 4:32:3600. Bukhari 1:9:483; 2:24:562; 2:26:746; 4:52:230, 231; 4:54:540, 541, 542; 5:57:81, 90, 96; 5:59:552, 569, 744, 745, 597; 7:72:772, 843, 847; 8:73:23, 32 8:80:761, 762; 8:81:778, 779; 9:89:297. Muslim 2:551; 4:1109; 7:2947; 8:3441; 9:3512, 3526; 10:3809, 3810, 3811, 3812, 3813, 3814; 17:4188; 19:4431; 24:5143, 5248; 26:5545; 31:5954, 5959. Abu Dawud 16:2839, 2840; 32:4146. Tirmidhi 5:41:2806. Tabari (Landau-Tasserón) 39:65.

22 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 651-652. Waqidi (Faizer) 539-541, 543-545. Bukhari 1:3:67. Muslim 7:2803. Abu Dawud 10:1900. Tabari (Poonawala) 9:122-113.

23 Q110:1-3 (Shakir).

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28 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 516, 678-682, 689. Malik 45:17. Waqidi (Faizer) 334, 547. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:236-237, 256-259, 266, 268-275, 278, 281, 288-293, 299-305, 316-318; (Bewley) 8:59, 123. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:103. Bukhari 4:51:2; 4:52:288; 5:59:713; 7:62:144; 7:63:193; 7:70:573; 9:86:102. Muslim 4:833; 9:3497; 19:4366. Abu Dawud 19:3024; 41:4497, 4499. Tirmidhi 3:19:1606, 1607. Tabari (Poonawala) 9:108, 163-165.

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## Epilogue

The Muslims elected Abu Bakr as the Successor (*khalifa* or Caliph) to Muhammad and leader of the Islamic state. Saad Saïda, high chief of the Lions, was so disillusioned that he emigrated to Syria, where he was soon afterwards mysteriously assassinated. Ali was also disappointed but he made no trouble. Fatima died only six months later.

After Muhammad's death, several of the Arab tribes declared they would never again pay tax to Medina and they apostatised from Islam. Abu Bakr determined to fight the apostates until they re-submitted and paid every penny due "down to the last camel's halter." He mobilised the army and fought the rebels.

By the time Abu Bakr died of a fever in 634, he had once again united the Arabian peninsula. Umar, whom he appointed as the second Caliph, began his rule over Islam as King of Arabia.<sup>1</sup>

For ten years, Umar obeyed Muhammad's call and dedicated himself to conquest. He sent his armies to the Christian territories of Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Jerusalem and the Holy Land, much of the Eastern Roman Empire, Egypt, Mauritania and Morocco and the Zoroastrian lands in Iran and parts of Afghanistan. He was victorious, and so these territories fell under Islamic rule. He governed by *sharia* "with the most complete success."

In 641 Umar heeded Muhammad's deathbed wish. He expelled all the Jews and Christians from Khaybar, Najran, Fadak and every other place in Arabia. They settled in Syria, where they continued to pay their super-tax.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, Muhammad's widow Aïsha hung a curtain in her house and sat behind it so that men could hear her without seeing her. She devoted the rest of her life to teaching Islam and giving legal judgments according to *sharia*. She was considered a very learned person: senior Muslims consulted her. Her work preserved the

teachings of Muhammad and shaped much of Islamic belief and behaviour into the form it has held ever since.<sup>3</sup>

Umar was an Emperor long before 644, when an angry slave assassinated him.<sup>4</sup> His closest companions elected Uthman Umayya as the third Caliph. Uthman was not particularly clever or brave; but he had been Muhammad's son-in-law twice and he was related to everyone in the old aristocracy of Mecca.

For the next twelve years, Uthman continued conquering the world. He attacked Cyprus and Spain, and adding the remaining provinces of North Africa, Anatolia (modern Turkey), Persia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, most of modern Afghanistan and parts of western India (modern Pakistan) to the Islamic empire.<sup>5</sup>

In 652 he standardised the Quraan, making many small changes, and ordered all the variant copies to be burned. He had the chapters arranged in the same order that they appear today, approximately from longest to shortest, which is nearly the reverse of their chronological order. The Quraan had finally transitioned from being an oral tradition to being a written book.<sup>6</sup>

Abu Sufyan lost his second eye while he was fighting a *jihad*, so he never had to fight again. He lived to be 85. He died more or less happy, knowing that his cousin Uthman was a great Emperor and that the Umayya clan was (thanks to Muhammad) powerful beyond their dreams.<sup>7</sup> Uncle Abbas also lived to be 85 and also became blind. He was always rich and successful.<sup>8</sup>

Uthman was assassinated by a rebellious mob in 656.<sup>9</sup> The Muslims elected Ali as the fourth Caliph. Aïsha, who hated Ali, set up a rival party to fight him for the throne. Ali's army defeated Aïsha's at Basra during a bloody battle in which a quarter of the men were slain. No sooner was Ali established than he suffered a fresh challenge from Abu Sufyan's son Muaawiyah. They fought for the throne for the next four years. Finally Ali was assassinated by a Yemenite rebel in 661.<sup>10</sup>

Ali's sons did not have the political or personal strength to resist Abu Sufyan's son for long. Muaawiyah, who was clever and patient, ruled for nearly twenty years without serious opposition. Once the fifth Caliph was in control, he resumed the agenda of world-conquest. He consolidated Islamic command over the former Persian Empire and overran Sudan. Superstitious people had no doubt that he was the "great king" whom the soothsayer had long ago promised to his mother Hind. He died naturally in 680.<sup>11</sup>

Aïsha also lived a natural lifespan. She continued her teaching and judiciary career until her death in 678.<sup>12</sup>

The basic conflict between Ali and Muaawiyah was never resolved. Muslims who believed that Islam's leader could only be a descendant of Muhammad (and hence of Ali) were already known as *Shia* ("party supporters"). Those who believed that the Muslims should elect a Caliph to rule them were known as *Sunni* (believers in the "customs" or *sunna* of Muhammad).

The Umayya clan ruled the Empire for 89 years. In 750 the descendants of Abbas defeated them and took over. Once the Abbasid Caliphs came to power, they discarded Shia ideas and became orthodox Sunnis. While this set the stage for the Sunnis to be the majority throughout history, the Shia remained a large minority. They have never abandoned their support for the biological descendants of Ali.

This internal dispute between Muslims about who should lead them has been a constant interruption to the efforts of both factions to conquer the world.<sup>13</sup>

Muhammad, who is dead, lies buried where he died. His grave was dug in the floor of Aïsha's house, and he was laid there on a red sheet, a brick marking the spot. Aïsha's house was later destroyed to make way for a newer and grander mosque; but Muhammad's tomb is still marked for Muslim tourists to see.<sup>14</sup> There are no non-Muslim tourists, for no non-Muslim is allowed inside Medina or Mecca.

Allah, who is alive in the hearts of Muslims, has never changed the message that He delivered through His final prophet. All human beings must submit to Allah, declare that He is One and acknowledge that Muhammad is His messenger.

The world is nevertheless full of disobedient people who do not submit to Allah. Therefore the sword of Islam has never been sheathed.

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#### References and Notes to the Epilogue

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- 2 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 515-516. Malik 45:5:18, 19. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:218. Baladhuri (Hitti) 1:46, 49. Bukhari 3:39:531; 3:50:890. Muslim 10:3763. Abu Dawud 19:3001, 3008. Tabari (Smith) 14:89-90, 94. Suyuti (Jarrett) 135-137. Muir (1924) 190.
- 3 Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:480-482; (Bewley) 8:148. Bukhari 1:5:251; 6:61:515; 7:68:473. Tirmidhi 6:46:3883. Ibn Hajar, Isaba 8 #11457. Siddiqi (2006) 26-27.
- 4 Tabari (Smith) 14:89-90, 94.
- 5 Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:45-46. Bukhari 5:59:395. Tabari (Smith) 14:95, 148-149; (Humphreys) 15:254. Suyuti (Jarrett) 159-161.
- 6 Malik 8:8:27. Ibn Saad (Haq) 2:444. Bukhari 6:61:510. Muslim 4:1316; 5:2286. Tirmidhi 6:44:3104. Tabari (Humphreys) 15:8-9, 156. Suyuti (Jarrett) 170. Gilchrist (1989) 42-50, 55ff, 62-73, 91ff.
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- 8 Tabari (Landau-Tasseron) 39:25. Majlisi (Rizvi) 1208.
- 9 Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:46, 53-56. Tabari (Humphreys) 15:190-191, 252. Suyuti (Jarrett) 167.
- 10 Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:21-28. Tabari (Brockett) 16:52, 69-70, 76, 121, 124, 126-127, 135, 149-150, 156, 164, 171; (Hawting) 17:11-16, 69-70, 143, 150-159, 198-200, 206-207, 213-216, 226-227. Suyuti (Jarrett) 166, 176, 178.
- 11 Suyuti (Jarrett) 178, 197-199, 200-202
- 12 Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:54.
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- 14 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 688-689. Ibn Saad (Haq) 1:364-373, 592-595; (Bewley) 8:46, 122.

## Appendix

### *The Sharia*

The *sharia* is Allah's law as delivered through Muhammad. Because Allah Himself has spoken, the *sharia* is considered perfect. It can never be changed, modified or reformed. It is Allah's law for all people at all times and places.

Muslims who avoided all the big sins could be confident that Allah would overlook their small sins and grant them an honourable place in Heaven. The shepherd Ibn Masud once asked, "What are the greatest of all sins?" Muhammad replied, "Worshipping idols, killing a child whom you can't afford to feed and committing adultery." On a different occasion, he said that the worst sins were, "Worshipping idols, murder, being undutiful to your parents and bearing false witness."

Obviously Muslims did sometimes disobey the *sharia*, both in great matters and small. Muhammad taught that a Muslim could avoid Allah's punishment in the afterlife by submitting to punishment on earth. This could be either the formal punishment decreed by a *sharia* judge or general life-suffering such as an illness. Anyone who managed to escape earthly punishment for the great sins was at risk of going to Hell, although Allah might still choose to forgive.<sup>1</sup>

The *sharia* was recorded in millions of words in hundreds of dusty volumes. This appendix is not an attempt to summarise it or give an overview. It is simply an introduction that gives some *sharia* rulings on five issues: truthfulness, money, family, slavery and crime.

One of the earliest moral issues to be clarified was that of truthfulness and lying. It arose when the Muslims were being persecuted in Mecca.

Trade and money was one of the first areas to be legislated after Muhammad arrived in Medina.

Much of the Islamic family law was clarified after military disasters such as the Battle of Uhud. Some rules were responses to situations that had arisen in the community.

Muhammad's regulations for slavery seem very complex in a society where slavery is unknown. They seemed less complex to seventh-century Arabs because they only slightly modified the existing customs of Arabia. The system for who could own whom, what ownership meant and how slaves could be freed was well understood long before Muhammad's time.

After Muhammad became "King" of Medina in 627, he could enforce Allah's rules on criminal as well as civil and ritual matters. He therefore set legal punishments for a variety of crimes.

### ***Sharia Lying***

In general, it was compulsory (*fard*) for Muslims to tell the truth.

- Habitual truthfulness built good character and led to Heaven. Lying was a sign of hypocrisy, and habitual lying led to Hell.
- Giving false witness in a formal situation was a grave sin that could be punished with flogging and a lifetime ban on standing as witness to anything else.
- Ideally there should be two witnesses; an accusation of adultery required four. For less serious issues, it might be necessary to settle for only one witness rather than leave the issue unresolved. People of bad character, e.g., those who spoke curses, were not allowed to be witnesses.
- A woman's testimony was worth half a man's because women were more likely to make mistakes. If two men could not be found, one man and two women were an acceptable substitute.

However, there were exceptions to the truthfulness rule.

- It was acceptable to say good but untrue things in order to make peace between people or to soothe a spouse. Conversely, it was not allowed to say anything that might distress another Muslim, even if it were true.
- A Muslim could lie to save his life, even if this meant denying that he was a Muslim.
- Muhammad expected his men to lie when the purpose was to advance Islam.
- Allah was "the best Plotter". He had deceived the early Christians by letting them think Jesus had been crucified when in fact Jesus was safely in Heaven; and He had deceived the Quraysh by saving the Muslims from them.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Sharia* Trade and Money**

- Money had to be honestly earned.
  - Muslims were forbidden to use money that had been earned from prostitution, fortune-telling or selling a dog.
  - Gambling and games of chance were forbidden.
  - Anyone who dug up buried treasure must give 20% to the state but was allowed to keep the rest.
- People who earned money were entitled to keep it. A woman did not have to hand her earnings over to her husband.
- It was forbidden to cheat another Muslim out of his property by any means.
  - There was a moral duty to discharge all trusts.
  - There was a specific ban on bribing a judge.
  - A Muslim could only sell what he currently possessed. For example, fruit could not be sold before it was ripe, and cooked food could not be sold before it had been cooked.
  - Neither buyers nor sellers could change their minds over a sale once the goods and money had changed hands.
- Loans were certified in writing before two male witnesses. Charging interest was forbidden. If a debtor genuinely could not afford to pay, repayment should be postponed or even cancelled.
- People had a duty to support their parents and other relatives. If they had any money left over, they were encouraged to give it away to help poor people, travellers and the expenses of fighting the *jihad*.<sup>3</sup>



### ***Sharia Family Law***

#### **Marriage**

- The consent of a bride's guardian (usually her father) was required to make a marriage valid.
- Forced marriage was technically forbidden. A matron had to declare out loud her consent to a new marriage; and a maiden's consent was inferred from her silence. However, there was no minimum age for a legal marriage (although Muhammad discouraged the marrying off of hypothetical daughters who had not yet been born); and a marriage might be consummated well before the bride was old enough to menstruate.
- A Muslim woman could have only one husband at a time and he must be a Muslim. A married woman who converted to Islam was automatically divorced from her unbelieving husband; if he did not convert within three months, she could then marry a Muslim.
- A Muslim man also had to divorce any wives who were polytheists; but he was allowed to marry Jewish or Christian women. He was allowed four wives at a time. If he had more than four wives when he converted to Islam, he had to choose four and divorce the rest.
- A bridegroom paid his bride a dowry, which was her property. Muhammad discouraged large dowries: the 400 silver coins that he paid most of his wives was quite modest.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Divorce**

- In keeping with the old customs, a husband could divorce his wife by saying, "I divorce thee," with no need to give a reason. When she left his house, she kept her dowry.

- Allah made it more difficult than before for a wife to divorce her husband. She had to plead a compelling reason. Neither ordinary beating nor the presence of co-wives or concubines qualified as a reason; but Muhammad did order a divorce for a woman whose bridegroom had broken her arm. She had to pay her husband a compensation sum, which might be far more than her original dower.
- Muhammad sometimes settled custody disputes by asking the child to choose between the parents.<sup>5</sup>

### **Inheritance**

Before Islam the polytheists could and did bequeath their property to whomever they liked. However, if a person died without leaving a will, the sons or brothers might take everything; widows, daughters and elderly parents could be left with no support. Muhammad's new system guaranteed a share to these relatives.

- The simplified version of his very complex formula was that he granted a quarter of the estate to a husband, an eighth to a wife (to be equally divided if there was more than one wife) and one-sixth to each parent. The rest was divided among the deceased's children. Each son received twice as much as each daughter.
- If the heir was a fatherless child, a guardian took care of the property until the child reached puberty. A guardian who stole from a ward would go to Hell.
- An unbeliever could not inherit anything from a Muslim or vice versa.<sup>6</sup>

It was a rigid formula from which no Muslim was ever allowed to deviate. It meant that a man could not treat his daughters equally to his sons, or favour a poor relative over a rich one, even if he wanted to.

### ***Sharia Slavery***

#### **Enslavement**

- There were several ways to acquire a slave:
  - by capturing a prisoner-of-war;
  - by receiving one as a gift, inheritance or penalty-payment;
  - by breeding from slaves already owned;
  - by purchase from individuals or on the slave-market. In pre-Islamic times these slaves were often kidnap victims.
- It was a blessing for non-Muslims to be captured into Islamic slavery as it gave them a chance to convert to Islam. However, a slave who converted to Islam was not automatically freed.<sup>7</sup>

#### **The Master's Rights**

- A slave had a duty to obey his master and be careful with his property.
- A master had discretion to punish his slave as he saw fit, including beating and even killing.
- A free man could not be killed for murdering another man's slave but he had to pay blood-money to the master.
- A male owner had the right to have sex with his female slave. This was not considered rape because the slave had no legal right to refuse her master. There was no limit to the number of slave-women that a man could keep as concubines; they were not included among his four wives, and it was not considered adultery.<sup>8</sup>

#### **The Slave's Rights**

- A master had a duty to feed and clothe his slaves, speak kind words and not impose an "excessive" workload.

- If the master gave a disproportionate punishment, the state might force him to free the slave. If he killed a Muslim slave for no reason, the master could be executed for murder. Allah would punish bad masters in the afterlife.
- Slaves could own property. Some slaves even possessed slaves of their own.
- Children whom slave-concubines bore to their masters were not illegitimate and were not slaves. They had the same rights as the children born to free wives.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Freeing of Slaves**

All slave-owning societies have a system for setting some of those slaves free.

- In continuation of the old Arabic custom, a slave could buy his freedom if his Muslim master agreed.
- A master could also free a slave out of kindness or as an act of penance. It was a virtue to free a Muslim slave; but there was nothing wrong with freeing a non-Muslim or with keeping all slaves in slavery.
- A concubine who bore her master's child could not be sold or given away and she was automatically freed when he died.
- Child-slaves could not be freed.

Freed slaves often stayed with their former masters as servants because they had nowhere else to go.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, Muhammad codified some of the customary rights of slaves into firm laws and he stopped some of the abuses, so he made life slightly better for slaves in Arabia. However, his command to fight *jihad* guaranteed that new slaves would continue to be captured and that Islam would increase the overall count of world slavery.

### ***Sharia Crime and Punishment***

There was no penalty for crimes committed by prepubescent children, by insane people or while asleep.<sup>11</sup>

<b><i>Crime</i></b>	<b><i>Punishment</i></b>
<b>Apostasy (leaving Islam)</b>	A Muslim who renounced Allah or Muhammad was beheaded. There was no need to bring an apostasy case to a law-court: any Muslim who found an apostate would be rewarded in Heaven for killing him. <sup>12</sup>
<b>Murder of a Muslim</b>	<p>The victim's family could either demand that the murderer be killed or else accept blood-money of a hundred camels.<sup>13</sup> In practice, this meant there was no penalty if the murderer and the victim were from the same family.</p> <p>No blood-money was due for an accidental death, such as being killed by an animal or falling down a well.<sup>14</sup></p>
<b>Murder of one's own child</b>	Although killing one's own child was a terrible sin, there was no punishment on earth. <sup>15</sup>
<b>Murder of a non-Muslim ally</b>	The murderer had to pay blood-money of fifty camels or he would go to Hell. However, a Muslim could not be killed for slaying a non-Muslim. <sup>16</sup>
<b>Killing other non-Muslims</b>	The <i>sharia</i> definition of "murder" was to kill a Muslim. So there was no problem with killing a non-Muslim who was not in alliance with the Islamic community. The Muslim was not punished on earth or after death. <sup>17</sup>

<b>Adultery</b>	Adulterers were stoned to death. In fact it was difficult to prove adultery, since proof required a confession, a pregnancy or the testimony of four witnesses. In the case of pregnancy, the woman was only stoned after the baby was weaned. An unmarried person could only be punished for fornication even if the other party was married. <sup>18</sup>
<b>Fornication</b>	The penalty for an unmarried person who had sex was a hundred lashes, one year of exile and a lifetime ban on marrying any non-fornicator. <sup>19</sup>
<b>Rape</b>	A rapist suffered the usual penalty for fornication or adultery and he also had to pay his victim the price of a marriage-dower. The victim was not punished. <sup>20</sup> In practice it was difficult to prove that a rape had occurred, so the victim might end up being punished for adultery or fornication.
<b>Incest</b>	Incest was considered adultery and therefore incurred the death-penalty. Muhammad beheaded a man who married his stepmother and also confiscated his property. <sup>21</sup>
<b>Homosexuality</b>	If two men were caught in the act of sodomy, both were stoned to death, even if they were not married. <sup>22</sup>
<b>Assault</b>	Apostasy, murder and adultery were the only capital offences. <sup>23</sup> For a non-fatal assault, equal injury was inflicted. When one woman broke another's tooth, Muhammad sentenced

her to tooth-extraction.

The penalty did not apply in a clear case of self-defence. When one man bit another, and the victim wrenched out his hand so forcefully that two teeth fell out, Muhammad ruled that no compensation was due for the teeth “because you bit your brother like a camel.”<sup>24</sup>

**Stealing**

Since the time of Hammurabi, Arabs had amputated the right hand of a thief. Muhammad continued this if the stolen item was worth three silver coins or more. For a second offence a thief lost his left foot; for a third his left hand; for a fourth his right foot. It is difficult to imagine how such a person would manage to commit a fifth offence, but there was a case when Muhammad sentenced a fifth-time thief to death.<sup>25</sup>

**Not paying the alms-tax**

Tax-collectors fought anyone who refused to pay until they extracted their full dues. The culprits were made to stand in the desert sun with olive-oil poured on their heads.<sup>26</sup>

**Slander**

Some false accusations could be punished with flogging. Muhammad ordered eighty lashes for a false charge of adultery, together with a lifetime ban on bearing witness in a law-court, and twenty lashes for calling a fellow-Muslim a Jew or a homosexual.<sup>27</sup>

**Drinking alcohol**

In Muhammad’s time the penalty was a communal beating. Everyone would join together in hitting the drunk with their hands,

	sandals, cloaks or palm-stalks. Caliph Umar later fixed the punishment at eighty lashes. <sup>28</sup>
<b>Being undutiful to parents</b>	<p>Parents had discretion to beat their children for faults such as disobedience, refusing to say their prayers and making mistakes in pronunciation.</p> <p>An adult who cursed his parents or did not provide for them in their old age would go to Hell.<sup>29</sup></p>
<b>Trespass</b>	A householder was allowed to defend himself against trespassers and spies. Muhammad once saw that someone was peeping through a crack in his front door, so he poked an arrow-head through the crack. He said that a spy who lost his eye like that had only himself to blame. <sup>30</sup>
<b>Breaching the Ramadan fast</b>	Compensation was made by performing good works, such as fasting for an extra month, giving food to sixty poor people or freeing a Muslim slave. In practice, the penalty could usually be avoided if the fast-breacher did not confess. <sup>31</sup>
<b>General Misbehaviour</b>	Beating was inflicted for a variety of small offences, including disobedience to one's husband and playing backgammon. If the crime was not one for which the <i>sharia</i> stipulated a fixed punishment, the maximum number of lashes was ten, and striking the face was forbidden. <sup>32</sup>



## References and Notes to the Appendix

- 1 Q4:30. Bukhari 7:70:551; 8:81:775, 793; 8:82:802; 9:83:9, 10; 9:93:560. Muslim 32:6242. Nasāi 5:39:4166, 4167, 4183.
- 2 Q2:42, 282; 3:54; 6:93; 8:30; 16:106; 24:4, 13. Malik 37:7; 56:10. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 458, 602. Waqidi (Faizer) 261. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 3:190-191. Bukhari 3:49:857; 4:52:269, 271; 5:59:369; 8:73:8. Bukhari, *Mufrad* 21:385, 386, 387. Muslim 32:6265, 6303, 6307, 6309. Abu Dawud 42:4889. Tirmidhi 3:13:1345; 3:48:826. Ibn Hajar, *Bulugh* 16:1548.
- 3 Q2:188, 215, 219, 275--283; 3:130; 4:32; 9:60. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 393. Malik 31:43. Waqidi (Faizer) 336. Bukhari 2:24:564; 3:34:290, 293, 321, 327, 401; 7:71:656; 9:83:47. Abu Dawud 23:3496. Nasāi 5:44:4607; 6:48:5091. Ibn Maja 3:12:2218.
- 4 Q2:221; 4:3, 19; 5:6; 33:49; 60:10; 65:1, 4. Ibn Hisham (Guillaume) 792-794 #918. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:102. Bukhari 5:59:2582; 7:62:67, 69; 9:85:78, 79, 81. Abu Dawud 11:2098, 2099; 12:2233. Tirmidhi 2:6:1102. Ibn Maja 3:9:1953. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q60:10.
- The "unbelieving man" who was forbidden to marry a Muslim woman was understood to include a Jew or Christian because a husband had authority over his wife, and Q4:141 forbids an unbeliever to hold authority over a Muslim. Since Jewish and Christian women are forbidden to marry outside their faith, it is difficult to understand how their marriages to Muslim men could have been practised in real life.
- 5 Q2:229; 4:3, 4:19-20, 34; 23:6. Malik 29:10:32; 29:11:33. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:40. Bukhari 7:63:197, 198, 199, 200; 7:72:715. Muslim 9:3493. Abu Dawud 12:2218, 2236, 2270. Nasāi 4:27:3493, 3527. Ibn Maja 3:10:2017. Smith (1907) 80-83.
- 6 Q4:2, 6, 10, 12. Ibn Saad (Hag) 1:139. Bukhari 4:51:10; 6:60:102; 8:80:724, 727, 729, 731, 756. Muslim 7:3132. Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir* on Q4:11.
- 7 Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 466, 593, 653. Malik 38:5; 39:3, 6. Bukhari 3:46:716, 717, 725, 726, 727; 6:60:80; 9:83:42. Abu Dawud 9:1652. Tabari (Landau-Tasseron) 39:6.
- 8 Q4:24; 23:6; 33:50; 66:3. Malik 43:15. Waqidi (Faizer) 462.
- 9 Malik 38:5, 7, 21; 39:3; 43:14. Ibn Saad (Bewley) 8:145. Bukhari 3:46:720, 721, 722, 723, 725, 726, 727, 732, 734; 8:82:841. Bukhari, *Mufrad* 9:90:170; 9:92:174; 9:93:177, 180. Muslim 15:4079. Abu Dawud 10:1814; 12:2257; 39:4348; 39:4458; 40:4501. Tirmidhi 3:14:1414. Ibn Maja 4:23:2745.
- 10 Q47:4. Malik 22:12; 38:5, 6, 7, 12, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24; 39:3. Bukhari 3:46:693, 694, 711, 713, 715; 3:47:765; 8:82:811.
- 11 Tirmidhi 3:15:1423.
- 12 Bukhari 9:83:17, 37; 9:84:64. Nasāi 5:37:4062, 4065, 4066, 4067, 4068. Tirmidhi 4:7:2158. Ibn Maja 3:20:2533.
- 13 Q2:178; 4:29. Bukhari 9:83:16, 18, 19, 20, 36. Tirmidhi 3:14:1387.
- 14 Bukhari 9:83:47.
- 15 Q6:151; 17:31; 81:8-9. Bukhari 8:82:802. Tirmidhi 3:14:1399, 1400, 1401.
- 16 Malik 43:3. Bukhari 9:83:49, 50. Abu Dawud 40:4491. Tirmidhi 3:14:1404, 1413. Ibn Maja 21:2762.
- 17 Q4:92. Bukhari 5:58:194. Abu Dawud 14:2489, 2607, 2635; 39:4348. Ibn Maja 3:20:2533.
- 18 Q24:12-13. Malik 41:5. Bukhari 8:82:806, 818, 826. Muslim 17:4194, 4206. Abu Dawud 39:4428. Tirmidhi 3:15:1435.
- 19 Q24:2, 26. Bukhari 3:48:817; 8:82:818, 822.

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20 Malik 36:14:18. Abu Dawud 39:4366. Tirmidhi 3:15:1453, 1454.

21 Abu Dawud 39:4442. Tirmidhi 3:15:1462.

22 Abu Dawud 39:4447, 4448. Tirmidhi 3:15:1456.

23 Bukhari 9:83:17, 37.

24 Q2:194. Waqidi (Faizer) 496. Bukhari 9:83:30, 32. Tirmidhi 3:14:1416.

25 Q5:38. Ibn Ishaq (Guillaume) 84. Bukhari 8:81:780, 785, 787. Abu Dawud 39:4396. Tisdall (1905) 11.

26 Muslim 17:32; 32:6327, 6328.

27 Q24:4. Tirmidhi 3:15:1462; 3:17:1467.

28 Bukhari 8:81:766, 768, 770.

29 Bukhari, *Mufrad* 7:79:142; 36:390:880. Abu Dawud 2:494, 495. Nasāi 3:23:2563. Tirmidhi 4:27:1909.

30 Bukhari 9:83:26, 27, 38.

31 Bukhari 8:82:811.

32 Q4:34. Bukhari 8:82:831. Bukhari, *Mufrad* 52:616:1273. Abu Dawud 39:4476, 4478. Tirmidhi 3:15:1463.

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## *About the Author*

Tara MacArthur enjoys writing. That is why she wrote this book. She also enjoys her privacy. That is why she wrote it under a pseudonym.